

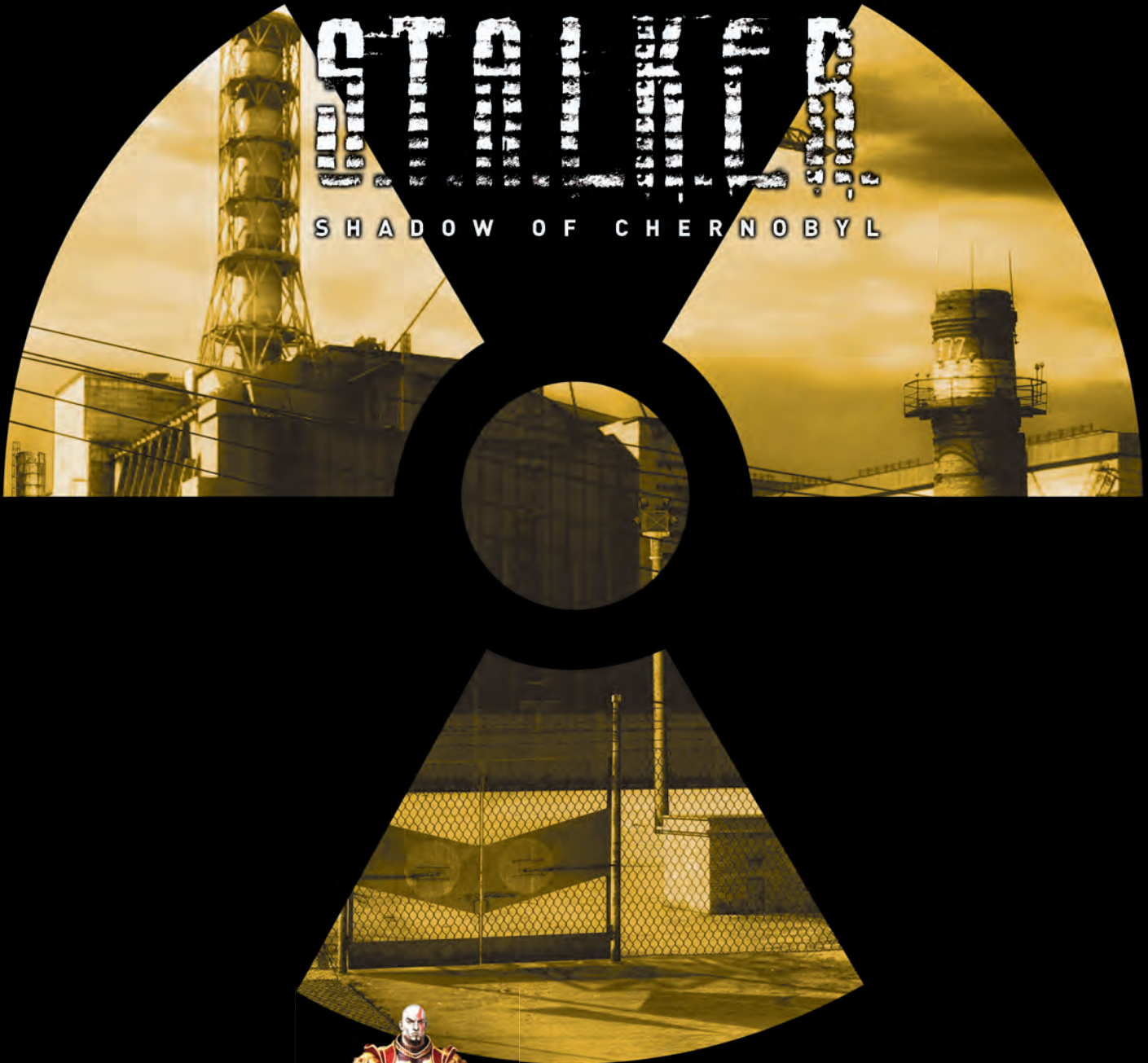
PC XBOX 360 GBA DS MOBILE PSP PLAYSTATION 2

MARCH 2007 VOLUME 9 ISSUE 12

# NAG



2 MONSTER POSTERS INSIDE



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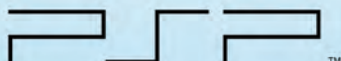
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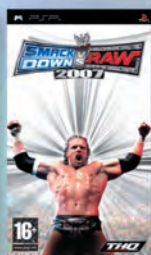
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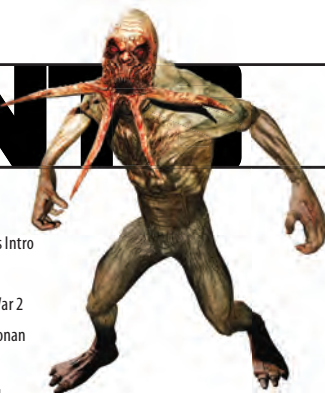


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## ON THE DVD

### DEMOS

Supreme Commander | UFO: Afterlight | UFO: Alien Invasion  
Armada Online Alpha | Battletations: Midway | Dystopia  
Sam & Max: Situation: Comedy | Tortuga

### GAME TRAILERS

Age of Conan | Battlefield 2142: Northern Strike  
Black Mesa Source | Burnout Dominator | Crysis DX10 | Def Jam Icon  
Fable 2 | Gods and Heroes | GRAW 2: Gameplay 1 – 4 | GRAW 2: Gimme  
Danger | S.T.A.L.K.E.R. | Supreme Commander  
The Lord of the Rings Online | TM United Webisode1 Coppers | TM United  
Webisode2 Manialinks | Unreal Tournament 3 | Vanguard

### MOVIE TRAILERS

Invisible | Pans' Labyrinth | Shrek: The Third | Sunshine  
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles | The Simpsons Movie

### FULL MOVIES PATCHES

Full Throttle – The Movie  
Heroes of Might and Magic V – Heroes Might Magic v5.1.04 US  
Heroes Might Magic v5.1.041 US | Heroes of Might and Magic V: Hammers of  
Fate | Heroes Might Magic v5.2.01 US  
World of Warcraft – WoW-2.0.3-enGB-patch | WoW-2.0.3.6299-to-  
2.0.5.6320-enGB-patch | WoW-2.0.5.6320-to-2.0.6.6337-enUS-patch  
Rainbow Six Vegas v1.03 | Trackmania Original

### PATCHES

Battlefield 2 v1.41 | Battlefield 2142 v1.05 | Battlefield 2142 v1.06  
Call of Juarez v1.1.0.0 | Company of Heroes v1.2.0 to v1.3.0  
Dark Messiah v1.01 | Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter v1.35  
Gothic 3 v1.09 | LEGO Star Wars II v1124  
Warhammer Mark of Chaos v1.2 | Weird Worlds v1.2  
Jonny RPG  
Counter-Strike – de\_wanda  
Ryzom  
Battlefield 2 – BF2 Sandbox v0.4 | Far Cry – Assault Coop v1.0  
Half-Life 2 – Hidden Source Beta | Half-Life 2 – Weekday Warrior |  
Neverwinter Nights – Mystery at Willowbow  
Oblivion – Francesco's Optional New Items and Creatures | Quake 4 – Quake 4  
Fortress Alpha | World of Warcraft – CT Mod2  
Quicktime Alternative v1.76 | Windows Media Player 11  
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Computer says "No"

**S**O AM I GOING to get Vista? I'm not intending to, nor do I think you really care if I do or not. When it comes down to these things, gamers tend to jump the boat quickly, moan constantly about the problems and slowly come to appreciate the operating system. At the very least, tolerate it. So far, apart from a few Beta driver issues and the odd complaint, Vista seems to be making some sort of an impression. It's not like Windows 95.

The hype around Windows 95 was insane, so much so that I don't think the world has quite forgiven Microsoft yet. Not all the anti-M\$ spooks, but the general man-in-the-street-with-a-PC. There are quite a lot of those. I also can't shake the feeling that, despite all the visibility Vista has had, XP also created more of an initial impact. Maybe I'm just biased because I quite like XP, despite all of its horrible quirks. Or rather, I don't think Microsoft changed enough in Vista to remedy what annoys me about XP. Yeah, I haven't even used Vista yet, but the kind of changes I want are the kind you'd hear about immediately. That and to get Vista now means either getting an upgrade or sacrificing system performance. Alternatively, I can just stay on XP for now.

Keeping with Microsoft, XNA is finally out there and developing Live Arcade games might take as little as you and a few friends sweating it out in a garage. It recently struck me that XBLA doesn't have the most staple of games: chess. Then I wondered why someone doesn't make *Battle Chess* for the service. Seriously, if I could, I would and make some cash off it. You don't need copyright. Call it something like WarChess – no one reserved the act of knights ripping the arms off pawns. Hell, you could even get sneaky and sell more animation packs and chess sets on Live!

If you make this, you must pay me royalties. Or send me a free copy.

James Francis [Editor]



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## LETTER OF THE MOMENT

**FROM:** Cloud

**SUBJECT:** HAHAAHA!!

Let me just start off by saying that Anton Lines' article on how much South Africa sucks really cracked me up, and I find myself a bit disappointed in your magazine for actually printing it.

Sure, we do have problems, just as any other country does. We do have more than most European countries, yes, but the writing and printing of that article really was more a part of the problem than a solution to be honest. I mean, how does slamming your country just because you're now moving to the UK make things better for people in SA? I'll answer that question... it doesn't! So here we have a person saying "see ya, suckers" to all of us just because he's moving to the UK! Aahhahahahaha! That's so hilarious, because it's not that difficult mate.

Bottom line? Be part of the solution and not the problem. If SA is such a crappy place, I don't think you have a place writing articles for a South African magazine. And that's just the plain and simple truth (LOL; the stupidity of that article still makes me laugh).

*Well, the columnists are entitled to their opinions, though we don't always agree with Anton and his point of view, especially in this case. Bad-mouthing the country by just deciding that the grass is greener on the other side isn't helping anyone. Then again, maybe we're better off with people who think like that going somewhere else. Hey, perhaps there will be irony in this tale and Anton is mugged while skulking around Soho at two in the morning.*



The 'Letter of the Moment' prize is sponsored by EA South Africa. The winner receives two games for coming up with the most eclectic chicken scratch.

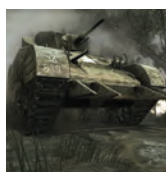
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### TOPIC FOR NEXT MONTH:

*Did you get Vista? Are you going to?*



**A PC CAN BRING SO MUCH MORE OUT OF GAMES THAN THE CONSOLES CAN. THAT'S WHY I SAY, LONG LIVE PC GAMES, AND MAY THE CONSOLES DIE A SLOW DEATH.**

derogatory letters to NAG about how stupid their staff were or how utterly useless their new editor was we'd all get two new titles from EA Games! Don't forget to include words like 'f\*\*\*-ups!' 'S\*\*\*!' and 'K\*\*\*-ass!' NAG obviously appreciates this sort of 'constructive' criticism, since they reward people who verbally abuse them. Consoles and PCs only matter to those who have and use them. As PC gamers we're happy as long as the titles never dry up, and we always have a community to interact with - 'passionate' letters don't help the cause if they're sloppy, and NAG doesn't help if they reward this.

*Hey, that letter spoke for itself. It said, "if you want to ramble incoherently about games to a magazine, you're probably like this guy." It said, "writing a letter to a magazine requires neither writing ability nor removing your head from your ass." But above all, it said, "colourful letters that would be too hard to edit actually make it easier to compile the letters page." Honestly, we wish everyone would send us badly written angry letters making inane arguments. Then one day we could just fill the letters section with random swearing and everyone would assume they were actually written by readers!*

**FROM:** Hyslop

**SUBJECT:** Leave old games be

After reading the 'RIP point-and-click genre' letter last month, there is something I wish to say: we need to give mourning old games a rest. We will get nowhere by moping over the past and demanding the resurrection/remake of old games: it's time to move on. Want my honest opinion? Those Sam & Max games ain't gonna work. We cannot and will not resurrect the point-and-click genre. And that's the tough but realistic truth. Yes, it's a pity, but if we keep trying to relive the past, we'll end up demanding that VGA be the highest acceptable graphics quality. Time to put away the old toys and step into the future confidently; nothing lasts forever.

*Yeah, we're sure you'll just let it go when the FPS, RPG and RTS genres stop existing. But actually, both you and the letter from last month have it wrong: adventure games appear to be alive and well, just not in the triple-A market. There are tons of indie point-and-click games and the scene is growing. As for Sam & Max, Telltale is working on a Wii adventure game. So, is the genre dead? For that matter, can a genre really die? Everyone was afraid that RTS would kill the turn-based strategy genre.*



**WE WILL GET NOWHERE BY MOPING OVER THE PAST AND DEMANDING THE RESURRECTION/REMAKE OF OLD GAMES.**

**FROM:** Vincent Dreyer

**SUBJECT:** Long Live the PC

Firstly, I love NAG, almost as much as I love my PC - which is a lot. And that brings me to a couple of concerns. Ever since the Xbox, Nintendo and PlayStation people have come out with their new version of the consoles, it would seem that certain games are all of a sudden just aimed at the console. Look at *Gears of Wars* and *Call of Duty*... I love that game. Many of the PC gamers have supported and loved it, and now they rob us of a third in the series by limiting it to the consoles. That's bulls\*\*\*. I don't see the point. A PC can bring so much more out of games than the consoles can. I have seen some of the stuff coming out on the consoles, and they look pretty and all that, but can they ever compare to how things can look on a PC. I doubt it. Plus, playability... On a console you are pretty limited to your options... everything has to be cramped into one controller. That's why I say, long live PC games, and may the consoles die a slow death. And may the fires of hell burn those software companies that want to limit games to the consoles.

*Well, Activision apparently didn't think things through when it made COD3, so it's rumoured that COD4 would appear on the PC as well. How about a different approach to the PC gaming dilemma? Publishers don't like the PC as much as consoles because it makes less money for them. Piracy doesn't help. So if you are serious about the PC as a gaming platform put your money where your mouth is and don't pirate any PC title. If you already don't, then don't let your friends pirate games. For every PC game pirated, publishers have one less reason to support the PC.*

**FROM:** Yo-DaWorks

**Subject:** PC users shamed

I purchased your February issue of NAG and was interested in the letter you awarded 'Letter of the Moment' (or perhaps you'll remember it as the 'passionate' letter). I was most amused to see that you actually bothered to read it, never mind print it, considering this person's stupendous amount of vernacular genius and exhaustive expanse of the English language: e.g. '...is that consoles a pieces [sic] of s\*\*\*!' and '...f\*\*\*-ups!' Wow! Maybe if we all wrote



**FROM:** Tyron Maartens

**SUBJECT:** The Old NAG

Since your new editor came into office, your magazine's quality has fallen in my eyes. I don't mean any disrespect here, but your magazine is completely out of order. I have given you two months to improve, but now I send you this e-mail. Your cover DVD. The movies. Where are they? You have three movies after E3? What the hell? In the April issue you had one movie! I was always scratching my eyes out or gnawing away at our furniture waiting for the new NAG. But since the mag has been changed, I feel very little comfort in the NAG I knew and loved. There used to be times when loading the cover DVD would show a menu that included DEMOS-MOVIES-PATCHES-UTILITIES-FLASH-ANIME-ADD-ONS. At least you have no shortage on free games. The magazine is completely out of order. The Badger Hunt and Caption of the Month competitions used to be on the last page. Now it's crammed into the middle. The calendar. Wow. I was impressed when this made its first appearance. But when trying to read it, the smile on my face went away. Please give us back the NAG we all have come to know and love.

*The new editor actually hates gaming and would much rather work on a magazine about gardening. Keep an eye out next month for a feature on indoor plants that will complement your HDTV!*

**FROM:** Werner Brummer

**SUBJECT:** LIVE in SA?

On the cover of the June issue it says: "Next-Gen now! If you can import it, the 360 is already here. Is it worth getting?" I read the article with great interest, but I still need some info to decide what the answer to that question is. A big part of the article is dedicated to explaining Xbox Live and how it is a very big part of what makes the 360 worth getting. Nowhere, however, was mention made of the fact that, if you live where we do, Xbox live just isn't going to happen for you. At least that is the impression I am under and that is also where I need some info, and as such have a suggestion for a follow-up article if you would. Internet broadband doesn't make much sense to me, and I am sure there are many other people who would like to read more about the practicalities too.

*We did a quick article about online gaming a few months ago, but you're not the first to complain that we didn't even really cover the basics. So a proper article about local online gaming is in the works and should be out soon. But while you*

*wait for that, we can confirm that Live does work locally and there are even a few local sites where you can find fellow 360 gamers looking for an online match. But get a 1Mbps line (Telkom1024) if you want to make it worth your while.*

**FROM:** Owirai I. Owira

**SUBJECT:** Sony

On posters that advertise games, at the bottom it normally shows what console the game is coming out on. One day I was casually observing a poster and I saw it was soon to be released on PlayStation. I looked just in front of the poster and saw a PlayStation icon. Does this mean the game is also coming out on PS1 and PS2?

*No, it's just a brand. The PlayStation icon is for the entire Sony PlayStation series. So if you see the icon at this stage it indicates PS2 or PS3 support. Sony might also use it for the PSP. But unless the poster also names the PSP or PS3, the icon means it's a PS2 game.*

**FROM:** Chris Wilding

**SUBJECT:** The Doom movie?

I rented the *Doom* movie a few days ago and thought it was really good, even though it wasn't that similar to the game. What do you guys think about it?

*No lost souls, no cyber-demon, no Hell and the only time someone uses the BFG, he misses. 'Nuff said.*

**FROM:** PC Swanepoel

**SUBJECT:** Now What?

I wish to congratulate you on a terrific magazine. Please allow me jump right to the matter at hand. After quite a while now, having experience in programming and knowledge in how pirates crack computer games, I have come up with extremely complex but utterly brilliant ideas to lessen or possibly even completely stop piracy. Yes, I know, it is impossible to stop piracy, but it is worth a shot, otherwise developers should resort to in-game advertising. Then a thought hit me just when I was about to tell the nearest person: What is going to happen if my plan succeeds? Why are people buying pirated games anyway? Is it that they can't afford it? If so, chances are those gamers will turn away from games to find another form of entertainment, thus losing thousands of gamers in the process. Your perspective on this matter will be greatly appreciated. I want to thank you all for creating a phenomenal magazine every month.

*The reality is that no matter what kind of anti-piracy measure you invent, it'll either be cracked*



**I LOOKED JUST IN FRONT OF THE POSTER AND SAW A PLAYSTATION ICON. DOES THIS MEAN THE GAME IS ALSO COMING OUT ON PS1 AND PS2?**

**EVERY SINGLE ONE OF YOUR ARTICLES WAS SO DEPRESSING, SAD, UNINSPIRED AND DOWNRIGHT JADED, I EVENTUALLY FELT BAD FOR YOU POOR GUYS WORKING AT NAG!**



*or it will cause more problems for legal users than it's worth. At the end of the day, the best measure against piracy is not to support it. Okay, sure, we all have copied a game to take a look at it (and hopefully bought it when we liked it). That's not really right, but buying pirated games is just completely wrong. If you're not willing to give your cash to the people who developed the game, why give money to the people ripping them off?*

**FROM:** TURNING POINT

**SUBJECT:** Jaded people, not jaded platforms

Let me start by saying that I have been buying and reading your magazine for years now and can't wait for every month's edition. I buy it over any other lame-ass game publication in SA. But hey guys, what happened in the February edition? Every single one of your articles was so depressing, sad, uninspired and downright jaded, I eventually felt bad for you poor guys working at NAG! I'm referring to 'Kingpin Jaded Hack', 'The Domain of The\_Basilisk - This is Sparta', 'Epilogue - The epilogue of the epilogue'. Come on guys, take your Prozac and look forward to a new year with a few decent upcoming titles (*Assassins' Creed*, *Crysis*, *Spore*, *Army of Two*, etc...), a new generation of gaming to explore and endless new technology! It's not all bad. Get up, forget about the cheesy game releases nobody cares about anyway and gear yourself for a huge 2007 - a year in which I think the gaming community will grow and start to come together like never before. If a game is good, no matter what platform, I will play it because of the fact that it is a brilliant game, not because it is on my preferred platform. I think this is exactly where many gamers miss great experiences, titles and diversity of games available and become bored with the same repetitive releases!

*Yeah, there was some melancholy going around in some of the Feb articles, but it wasn't us! These actions happened completely independent from each other. Miktar's farewell for the last page was quite sad, but we didn't want to push him on it, since he looked like he might cry. Anton's column, well, the man clearly had to get things off his chest (and lose a few fans in the process). As for Michael and his column, the man just wants to play games. So do we, but he reckons that's a good enough excuse to not write a column anymore. We tried the same, but he threatened to fire us. That's why the rest of us are so sad. But thanks for caring! As for Prozac - no dice. The last thing we need is everyone in the office being nice, friendly and understanding. It just wouldn't feel right.*



## PLAYSTATION 3 IMMINENT IN EUROPE

**S**O WHEN WILL THE PlayStation 3 launch in Europe? Well, all the signs (and Magic 8-balls) point towards 23 March. Here is what we know, based on information available at the time of writing:

Sony Computer Entertainment Europe has officially announced that the PlayStation 3 will launch in Europe with one million units (around 220,000 for the UK alone), and only the 60GB model will be available on launch. The 20GB model is said to follow later in the year, depending on demand. SCEE president David Reeves said, "Following the hugely successful launches of PS3 in Japan and North America, we are absolutely delighted to be able to bring significant numbers of PS3s to the SCEE territories. To be able to launch with over 30 titles across every genre shows that this is our strongest launch line-up in the history of PlayStation, and is what PlayStation fans in Europe have been crying out for."

The PS3 will be launching at an expected €599, which is roughly R5,580 (and doesn't bode well for a competitive pricing here in South Africa). Ireland is expecting a slightly higher price point at €629, apparently due to a higher VAT rate. Some reports have surfaced that UK retailers are already bumping up the expected street price of the PS3 to €647, as they attempt to net themselves a bigger profit margin. The expected launch line-up for Europe includes *Resistance: Fall of Man*, *MotorStorm*, *Genji: Days of the Blade*, *Ridge Racer 7* as well as *Tekken: Dark Resurrection* and *Full Auto 2*.



PLAYSTATION









## SNIPPETS

YOUR ESSENTIAL INFO, NOW IN BITE-SIZED PORTIONS!

Since its inception, the Live Arcade service limited the games sold on it to a size of 50MB. But Konami's *Castlevania: Symphony of the Night* has forced the size to be moved up to 250MB. Considering demos are always at least half a gig in size, it's about time!



Love your **WOW**? You don't compare to a French player who took no time to take advantage of the Burning Crusade's level boost. The expansion allows for a 17% increase in levels - basically, up to level 70. This guy managed to do it within 28 hours, becoming the first to do so. Meanwhile the rest of us were outside.



A rumour is making the rounds that **Microsoft** bought **CapCom**, but since neither party even bothered to deny it, it doesn't appear to be true. It seems CapCom's support of the 360 has gained it a reputation amongst the console's fans.

Sony has said it has plans to include files on **Blu-ray discs** that will let you copy smaller versions of the movie to a mobile device. Apparently this will happen some time next year, though, so don't hold your breath.



## LOST PLANET: EXTREME CAPITAL

**B**USINESS AND MEDIA MOGULS Forbes Inc. recently revealed that CapCom splashed out a formidable \$40 million on its latest Xbox 360 offering, *Lost Planet: Extreme Condition*. The first half of this considerable amount was spent on development, while the remaining \$20 million was left in the hands of a marketing hotshot pilfered from Midway Games. Hired to bolster CapCom's flagging reputation Stateside and in Europe, Mark Beaumont waged an aggressive campaign that began with last May's release of a demo featuring two levels of single-player bug-splatting.

CapCom went on to launch a contest for fans to create dedicated *Lost Planet* Websites, with the top three earning themselves hotlinks on the official game site. As excitement and anticipation were whipped to a frothy frenzy and the release date drew nearer, a second demo was released, while 60-second trailers began

appearing in theatres. And with over a million units shifted since its December 21<sup>st</sup> release, *Lost Planet* certainly looks set to pay its dues.



## BIOWARE EXPANDING ITS EPISODIC PLANS

**B**IOWARE, HARD AT WORK on *Dragon Age*, *Mass Effect* and other unannounced titles, has said that it intended to bring episodic content to quite a few of its projects. This is already the case with *Mass Effect*, which the developer has said it would support after the game's release with additional episodes to let players explore the universe more. However, in a recent interview with CVG, BioWare CEO

Ray Musyka said the focus will not just stay on this 360-bound RPG.

"We have big plans afoot at BioWare for post-release and episodic content for upcoming cool BioWare games like *Mass Effect*, *Dragon Age*, *Jade Empire: Special Edition* and other upcoming BioWare titles, both on console and PC." That's great news for all their fans, though you might want to go get yourself a broadband connection.



## WHO YOU GONNA CALL?

**G**HOSTBUSTERS! YEAH, THAT'S RIGHT, there is going to be a new *Ghostbusters* game after all. After the recent video clips that showed a *Ghostbusters* game for the 360 made by Zootfly, we were completely shocked when the project was canned because of Sony. This, fortunately, did not stop the inevitable, because now there is news about another *Ghostbusters* game in the works. Dan Akroyd stated that he would be doing some acting for it as well, although he sounded less than enthusiastic. The real question now is not if we will see a game, but rather who will develop it? Zootfly won't; it was developing its game for the Xbox 360 exclusively. Since the rights for the game lie with Sony, it makes all the sense in the world that they would want it to be made exclusively for the PS3 - or at the least not exclusive to Microsoft's console. It is now rumoured that Universal will publish the game under Vivendi Games, a subsidiary of the company. It is uncertain whether or not it will have PS3 exclusivity or an Xbox 360 version as well. Whatever the case may be, *Ghostbusters* fans worldwide will be happy that there is a game in development after 23 years of waiting since the movies. We will soon be given the chance to zap and catch some ghosts and ride in the Ghost mobile.

# PLAYSTATION 3

... end March 2007







## SONY MIGHT CONSIDER PRICE CUT ON PS3

IT APPEARS THAT SONY will consider dropping the price of the PlayStation 3 "when the timing is right," according to senior vice president Takao Yuhara. This comes hot on the heels of an explanation by Sony UK boss, Ray Maguire, on why the PS3 is being priced so relatively high in Europe compared to the US.

"We don't buy anything in dollars, so the dollar can go up and down," Maguire explained. "If it were \$1.40 to the pound as it was a while ago, then the PS3 would be a bargain compared to the US; if it's anything more than that, the UK price appears to be comparatively expensive. But we're dealing with Euros and yen - it's about the relationship between those currencies." "Of course, I

would dearly love to have the PlayStation 3 RRP under £400, and at such time as we can afford to do so, we will," he added.

On the flip side of the coin, Microsoft's Xbox 360 may not see a price cut in early 2007, although Microsoft's track record with the Xbox itself indicates that there may be a near \$100 price-drop eventually as they attempt to remain competitive against the PlayStation 3 and the Nintendo Wii.



## DEBT CAUSES PRO-GAMER SUICIDE

GAMBLING DOESN'T PAY. THESE words rang true when a Swedish professional gamer lost everything he had due to playing online poker. Unfortunately, the debt he incurred also cost him his life when he committed suicide in November. His body was found by his parents. Christian 'divino' Sellergren, a 21 year old, had led Team Eyeballers to the 2004 CPL Counterstrike Championship, but had accumulated over \$13,000 in debt after he became addicted to online gambling. Everyone thought he was a successful man with a job, a girlfriend and a nice apartment. However, when he died, it was discovered that he had been fired a long time ago and was about to lose his apartment as well. Switching on his computer, his parents found links to



many different poker sites. It is a sad day for the world of pro-gaming, but just goes to show that too much of something is bad for anyone.



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PC sandbox snowboarding game **Stoked Rider** is getting a very nice-looking Mac version. It will be available for download at [www.stokedrider.com](http://www.stokedrider.com)

Fancy a pretty CG girl on your credit card? Coming soon to the US are these *Dead or Alive* credits cards. Good for impulse purchases, such as *DOA* games, but doesn't wobble when shaken.



While shooting his new movie *Avatar*, **James Cameron** used the mother of all cameras. The movie is a mix of CG and real acting, so Jim's camera can show actors in the virtual world of the movie in real time. Don't you wish you had his job?



EA is enthusiastically supporting the mobile gaming market, specifically iPods and mobile phones. These platforms were responsible for 17% of the publisher's revenue last year and it plans a slew of new titles for 2007.



## CARMACK NOT IMPRESSED WITH VISTA

**L**EGENDARY ID SOFTWARE DEVELOPER John Carmack isn't in a hurry to move to Microsoft's latest OS, saying in a recent interview that, "Nothing is going to help a new game by going to a new operating system. There were some clear wins going from Windows 95 to Windows XP for games, but there really aren't any for Vista." He added that he "could run XP for a great many more years without having a problem with it." Moreover, he doesn't see id's game development migrating to Vista until it has been widely adopted by gamers.

While he's a big fan of the Xbox 360, Carmack has accused Microsoft of forcing consumers and developers to move to Vista because of its "artificial" tie with



DirectX 10 – something he insists is a hardware-interface specification that has little to do with the OS itself. Tech-hungry gamers eager to get their claws on high-priced DX10 graphics cards should hold off, advises Carmack, as current hardware is more than adequate. "All the high-end video cards are great nowadays," he said. "Personally, I wouldn't jump at something like DX10 right now. I would let things settle a little bit and wait until there's a really strong need for it." He went on to confirm that the upcoming *Enemy Territory: Quake Wars*, developed by Splash Damage using a heavily modified and upgraded version of the Doom 3 engine, would be a DX9 game, while id is currently at work on an entirely new franchise – for XP.

## VALVE BOSS LAMBASTS PS3

**I**N AN INTERVIEW WITH *Game Informer* magazine, Valve co-founder and managing director Gabe Newell declared the PS3 a "total disaster," and the result of Sony having "lost track of what customers and what developers wanted." While this has inevitably led to a badly-spelled "Well, Valve sux lol" blog backlash from PS3 diehards, Valve's has joined many other respectable and prominent developers, expressing dissent against Sony's



console, including id Software's John Carmack.

"I'd say, even at this late date, they should just cancel it and do a 'do over,'" Newell added. "Just say, 'This was a horrible disaster and we're sorry and we're going to stop selling this and stop trying to convince people to develop for it.'"

Newell went on to say that the Nintendo Wii would win the next-gen console wars, predicting that it will have outsold Microsoft's Xbox 360 by Christmas 2007. And he might be right. According to Hirokazu Hamamura, president of publisher and game industry researcher Enterbrain, "Many developers think the PS3's initial high price will lead to slow sales and are holding off on creating games for Sony," adding that these developers are instead migrating towards the more affordable Nintendo console.

## THE LEGO LOST PLANET VS SUIT

**W**ANT ONE OF THESE? It's five feet tall and took its creator, Nathan Sawaya, quite a while to do. Apparently, he watched the first two seasons of *Grey's Anatomy* while doing this. It was created for a Capcom *Lost Planet* launch event and even has a light on the front that you can switch on. However, don't expect to go buy one at your local toy store. Even if this was commercially available, all that Lego must cost a small fortune. Read more about this project at [www.kotaku.com/gaming/lego/](http://www.kotaku.com/gaming/lego/).



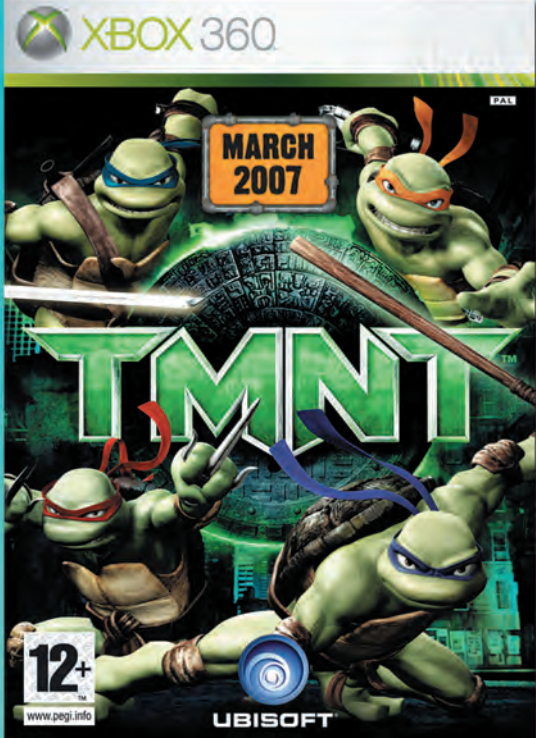
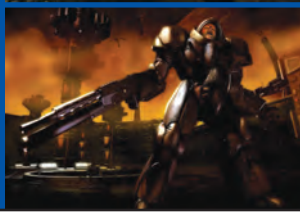
The revolution starts when we say it does.





## MOVERS & SHAKERS

**2**006 RECORDED ONE OF the best, if not the best, years in game sales history. Though there weren't that many classics, there are clearly more games. And you can expect a ton more on the horizon. *Flatout* makes a welcome return after the first two games. **Flatout: Ultimate Carnage** is set for the 360 and built from the ground up for the console. Yeah, it's going to be awesome. Keeping with racers, **Forza Motorsport 2** finally got a street date: May this year. However, it has been delayed before... The 360 can't seem to escape the rumour mills, with **Devil May Cry 4** once again being speculated to be heading to the platform. But Capcom says it has no such plans. Meanwhile, a 360 exclusive has also moved to the PS3. Freeform fans can expect **Saints Row** on Sony's platform soon. Sony also announced that it would be bringing more **Wipeout** games to the PS3 and PSP, including support for download content. Meanwhile, PS3-exclusive **Mercenaries 2** netted a published when Pandemic signed a deal with EA – no word on a 360 version yet. Unfortunately, PS3 owners will have to wait longer for the multi-next-gen **GRAV 2**, which is only due to hit the console later this year and after the 360 version. Staying on things Sony, Tony Hawk developer Neversoft will be taking over the reins from Harmonix to develop future **Guitar Hero** games. Harmonix wants to focus on other projects, such as hopefully an *Amplitude* sequel. Another music game might also get a sequel soon – **Rez**'s creator recently mused in an interview that he never stops thinking about making one. Meanwhile, everyone's 'favourite' analyst, Michael Pachter, has done a 180-degree turn on *Bully* and even said he expects a **Bully 2** to be announced soon. Maybe, maybe not, but Rockstar is working on a few new projects: **The Warriors** for PSP and, can you believe it, **Manhunt 2**! Mobile gamers can look forward to a new **Hitman** game. Called **Blood Money LA**, the bald killer heads to Los Angeles for a few dollars more. In other news; if you buy the new Sony-Ericsson SO703i, you will find a pleasant surprise on it: a mobile version of **LocoRoco**! Finally, we get to the PC. *Battlefield* players no doubt have already heard of **Northern Strike**, the upcoming expansion for **Battlefield 2142** that appears to have a lot of snow in it. MMO and DirectX 10 vehicle **Age of Conan** has been dated for release in October. A game that still waits for any kind of date is **Duke Nukem Forever** – recently, Relic released a single screenshot, apparently from in-game. One day you'll tell your children about it. And last but not least: Blizzard fans, listen up! At a recent Blizzard event, the company hinted at a new **Starcraft** in 2008.



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## LOST & FOUND

Every month in honour of our favourite TV show *Lost*, we'll hide the Dharma Initiative logo somewhere in the magazine. It could be in a screenshot, on a piece of hardware or anywhere, really. Find it and send an e-mail to [ed@nag.co.za](mailto:ed@nag.co.za) with the subject line [Dharma March]. We'll announce a random winner next month and that person will win... absolutely nothing! At least until next month when our new sponsor comes on board. If you're keen, send mail here: [ed@nag.co.za](mailto:ed@nag.co.za). Now last month we have to admit we hid the logo a little too well. So well, in fact, only one person spotted it. So congratulations keen-eyed reader! Hopefully it'll be a bit easier to find this month.

## LAST MONTH'S WINNER



Kyle Behrens, p62

## MOBILEG COUNTER STRIKE 1.6 BYOC

The folks at mobileG have sent word that they are holding a 3Com-powered *Counter-Strike 1.6 BYOC* competition at Ruimsig Athletic Stadium, Roodepoort, on Saturday 31 March 2007. Registration is now open at [www.thepgl.co.za](http://www.thepgl.co.za), and the entry fee is R120. The first prize is R5,000 cash. The event will also have an Open LAN and a small exhibition, as well as prize giveaways on the day for spectators. Details will be confirmed on the PGL site, so check in regularly for updates.



## SQUARE ENIX SIGNS UNREAL 3 ENGINE

**S**QUARE ENIX HAS BEEN going on and on about their "White" engine for how long now, making a big fuss about how awesome it is and how incredible *Final Fantasy XIII* is because of it. Seems they're not that attached to it after all, having recently signed up to use Epic's Unreal Engine 3. Quite a big departure from the norm for Square-Enix, who have always traditionally used proprietary technology. Taku Murata, general manager of the R&D Division at

Square Enix, explained in a statement, "The complexity of next-generation game systems featuring HD graphics and multi-core parallel processing poses a number of technological challenges to our game development. However, we can expedite our game development process significantly while allowing extra time and resources to be spent on game design and mechanics by establishing an effective technology platform."

## SONY AND NAMCO FORM CELLIUS

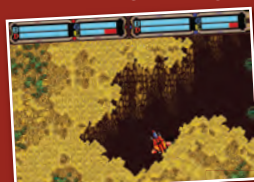
**S**ONY ENTERTAINMENT AND NAMCO-BANDAI have joined forces to form a new development team called Cellius. Cellius will develop games to utilise the PS3 technology to its full extent, as well as develop some games for the PC and mobile platforms. Sony, however, only owns 49% of this new company with Namco-Bandai owning the rest. That is good news for games, because it means that Sony doesn't have the authority to call the shots in this new venture. The technology firm has appointed the father of the PlayStation, Ken Kutaragi, as a part-time

executive director of this new development in the hopes that he will be able to boost sales of the PS3 by creating some good exclusive titles with Cellius. This is also due to the fact that many of the PS3 exclusives are now flying out the window to other platforms. At the moment, the PS3 hangs in the balance with focus put on Cellius and the new *Metal Gear Solid* and *Final Fantasy* games to bring them into the light.

SONY

BANDAI  
NAMCO

## THE EVOLUTION OF REAL-TIME STRATEGY



Herzog Zwei (1989)



Dune II (1992)



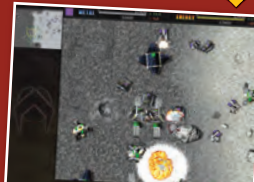
Warcraft (1994)



Command and Conquer (1995)



Dark Reign (1997)



Total Annihilation (1997)

## FREE GAME OF THE MONTH

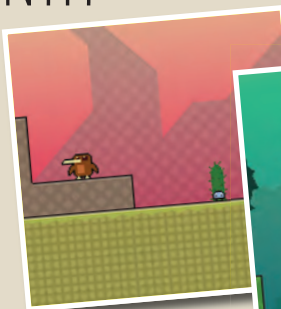
### KNYTT

URL: [knytt.ni2.se](http://knytt.ni2.se)

GENRE: Platformer

**"T**HE KNYTT WAS ABDUCTED by an alien! Travelling through space, the UFO flies into a meteor and crashes on a nearby planet. Luckily, the Knytt and the alien survive, but the UFO is a wreck. How can the Knytt possibly find its way back home again?"

*Knytt* is a whimsical free platformer with atmosphere. There is no combat, no switches, no keys - just pure exploration and platforming pleasure. The soundscape is beautiful, with soothing tones and sweeping melodies. The curiously charismatic characters and wonderful sense of scale all combine into a really enjoyable experience. *Knytt* takes its inspiration from *Ico* ([www.icothegame.com](http://www.icothegame.com)), *Doukutsu*



*Monogatari* ([agtp.romhack.net/doukutsu.html](http://agtp.romhack.net/doukutsu.html)), *Seiklus* ([www.autofish.net/clysm/games/seiklus](http://www.autofish.net/clysm/games/seiklus)), and *Shadow of The Colossus* ([www.shadowofthecolossus.com](http://www.shadowofthecolossus.com)). There's almost no reason for you not to play it.



## CAPTION OF THE MONTH

**E**VERY MONTH WE'LL CHOOSE a boring, odd or peculiar screenshot from any random game and write a bad caption for it. Your job is to come up with a better [funny] caption. The winner will get a free game from Vivendi Universal Games. Send your captions to [ed@nag.co.za](mailto:ed@nag.co.za) with the subject [March Caption].



### MARCH CONTEST

NAG'S LAME ATTEMPT:

"Give me your honest opinion. Does this hat make me look stupid?"



### FEBRUARY WINNER

"Locals soon realised the disadvantage of reverse parking on a horse."

– Warren Slatem

**RULES:** (1) If you don't use the correct subject line, your mail will be automatically filtered by our spam software and deleted. (2) If you think sending in 20 captions for the same screenshot is how you want to play the system, then put them all in the same mail or we'll keep the top one and delete the rest. You probably won't win anyway because you can't follow simple instructions. And people who can't follow simple instructions don't deserve to win things. (3) Obey all posted speed limits. (4) Never run with scissors. (5) There is no spoon. (6) Don't tell me what I can't do!

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## XBOX 360 IPTV FOR TELKOM?

**F**OLLOWING THE CONSUMER ELECTRONICS Show announcement that Microsoft would be integrating its Internet Protocol Television (IPTV) middleware platform into the Xbox 360, the rumour mill has been churning about Telkom's plans for the console. Speaking to MyADSL, a spokesperson confirmed that Telkom "have been working with Microsoft with respect to entertainment services. The Xbox 360 is part of the ongoing evaluations in respect of such services." This prompted speculation that they're testing the Xbox 360 for IPTV purposes. This would seem to be supported by a recent announcement that the telecommunications giant will begin launching digital media services over multiple platforms – including broadband, satellite and mobile – in the first quarter of 2007.



An IPTV service typically delivers regular TV programming, as well as Video On Demand. Integration with the Xbox would also mean that owners could stream films and TV shows while playing games. With the addition of increased hard drive capacity for DVR purposes, the Xbox could well become a rather nifty all-round entertainment box.

PC DVD-ROM

## SILENT HUNTER 4

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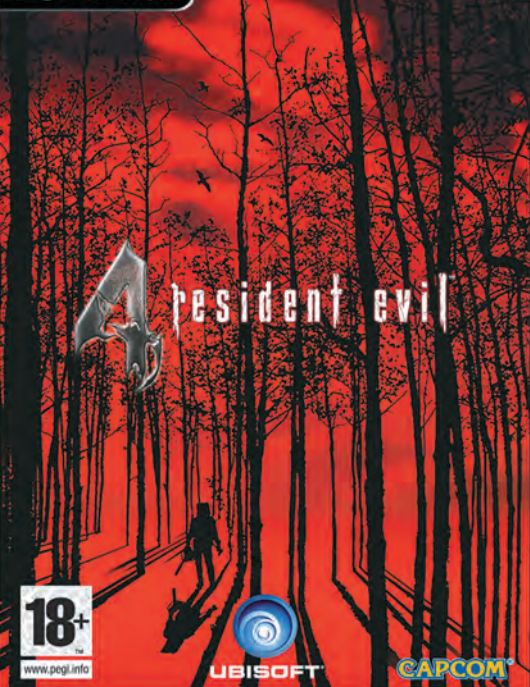


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The **UK** just celebrated its best year for game sales yet. 65.1 million units at a value of £1.36 billion were sold in 2006 - a climb of 7%. The PC market also grew 7% while the PS2 and 360 dominated the charts.

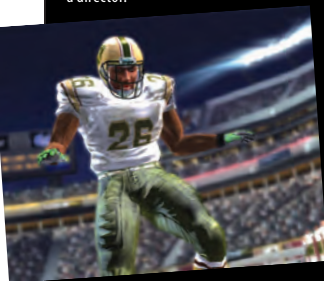
Microsoft has admitted that the **Zephyr** model that appeared in photos all over the Web recently does exist. But it's not a retail model. The company said it was made for research purposes. But we can hopefully look forward to hard drive upgrades soon.



While playing **Lost Planet**, did you get the feeling that you were not far from **Starship Troopers** of John Carpenter's **The Thing**? Turns out the game's producer, Keiji Inafune, used them as big influences when giving them the nod during a recent interview.



In a recent interview, renowned film director **Luc Besson** (*Deep Blue*, *The Fifth Element*, *La Femme Nikita*) mentioned that he has been asked to produce the **Hitman** movie. Yes, we're also having flashbacks to *The Professional*, but he hasn't accepted yet and the project is still short things like a director.



Australia's OFLC board has refused another game classification, but this time it had nothing to do with violence or spraying things on walls. Instead it was **Blitz: The League**, an American football title for the 360. The reason? Players can let players use legal and illegal performance enhancers in the game, which the OFLC feels sets a bad example.



## PAY-PER-MONTH HELLGATE: LONDON

**V**AGUE INSINUATIONS FROM NAMCO led us to believe that *Hellgate: London* might be appearing on the Xbox 360 as well as PC. When asked about the possibility of a 360 version, Namco admitted "that it's highly unlikely that such a notion is far from the company's planning calendar."

More importantly, news has surfaced that its developer, Flagship Studios led by ex-Blizzard great Bill Roper, is considering a subscriptions-based model for *Hellgate*'s online functionality. While co-publisher Electronic Arts has stated that the online pricing model has not been officially decided yet, Roper himself has talked at length about how *Hellgate: London* has plenty in common with

an MMO - including a subscription fee.

"Really, the biggest thing for us is wanting to reach out to the *Diablo* players," he said. "I think that people who play MMOs - whether it's *Everquest*, or *WoW*, or *Asheron's Call*, or whatever it is - they're really going to find something they like about the game... But I do think it's really important for us to make sure we reach out to those millions of *Diablo* players who really love the *Diablo* gameplay mechanic, who were really excited about *Diablo* and want to have that kind of gameplay experience again."



Bill Roper



## THE N-GAGE RETURNS

**F**OLLOWING THE TREND of handheld consoles once again, Nokia has announced a new N-Gage in its latest Nseries of phones. It is said that this phone will start a wave of next-gen games on our mobiles, and certain developers seem to have already signed up during a closed door convention recently held in the States. Publishers like EA Mobile, Gameloft and THQ Wireless are among them. It will probably not be a dedicated N-Gage 2 device as stated by Nokia's head of games, Jaako Kaidesoja, but rather a mixture of functions. He also stated that it would instead be like an iTunes Xbox Live-style software solution. We can just hope that it will be successful with the likes of Sony's PSP and Nintendo's GBA and DS already out in the market. Pending a September release, it looks like the new phone will capitalise on mobile games to fight the original N-Gage's big weakness: a lack of games and support from hardcore gamers.

## MOD OF THE MONTH

### WEEKDAY WARRIOR

GAME: *Half-Life 2*

URL: <http://students.guilhall.smu.edu/~weekdaywarrior/contents/html/home.html>

**O**LD SCHOOL ADVENTURE GAMES aren't dead; they're just limping along in the strangest of places. *Weekday Warrior* is a *Half-Life 2* mod designed to mimic the old point-and-click adventures, although a little more *Grim Fandango* than say, *Monkey Island*. Designed from the ground up, it has all the classic adventure gaming fun and even a few clever mini-games (such as Trashball, Voodoo Darts and Office Golf) just to prove a point. Developed in six months, it has complete voice acting that actually manages to hold together well.

You play Doug Smith, a bored man in a boring life. Because Doug is a corporate drone, the only way for him to explore his potential is to daydream himself into a better life. Because he's a comic book fan, he likes to fantasize of himself as The Mongoose, a James Bond super-spy. Thanks to a plot from upstairs, Doug has to save his office from impending doom.

We've included Weekday Warrior on the DVD, so be sure to check it out if you have *Half-Life 2*. The installation instructions are in the Weekday Warrior.txt file in the Mods/Half-Life 2 folder.





## CHARTS

### PC GAMES

#	Title
1	World of Warcraft: Burning Crusade
2	Sims 2 Pets
3	Need For Speed Carbon
4	Neverwinter Nights 2
5	Cricket 07
6	Dungeon Siege 2 Deluxe Edition
7	LOTR: Battle for Middle-earth 2: Rise of the Witch King
8	Pro Evolution Soccer 6
9	Heroes of Might & Magic V
10	Eragon

### PLAYSTATION 2

#	Title
1	Need For Speed Carbon
2	WWE Smackdown vs Raw 07
3	Singstar Legends
4	Eye Toy - Sports
5	FIFA 07
6	Pro Evolution Soccer 6
7	Cricket 07
8	Ace Combat Belkin War
9	Eyeto Kinetic Combat
10	Eragon

### PSP

#	Title
1	Need For Speed Carbon
2	WWE Smackdown vs Raw 07
3	Grand Theft Auto Vice City
4	Sims 2 Pets
5	Mortal Combat Unchained
6	Tekken Dark Resurrection
7	Ace Combat X: Skies of Deceit
8	Medal of Honor
9	Pro Evolution 6
10	FIFA 07

### XBOX 360

#	Title
1	Gears of War
2	Lost Planet
3	WWE Smackdown vs Raw 07
4	Pro Evolution Soccer 6
5	Rainbow 6 Las Vegas
6	Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2007
7	Superman Returns
8	Viva Piñata
9	Eragon
10	Import Tuner Challenge



**Hideo Kojima** has told Gamepro that he would like to create games for the 360 and PC. He's also a fan of *Gears of War* and the sales of the 360 in Europe made him think about a game for it. As for the PC - he says it will mean none of the problems as seen with companies like Sony and Microsoft.

**Sin Episodes** has been shelved for now. Apparently the first game did well and sold a lot of copies, but not enough to self-fund the second episode. But for now, Ritual, recently bought by MumboJumbo, will be working on casual games first before returning to the series.

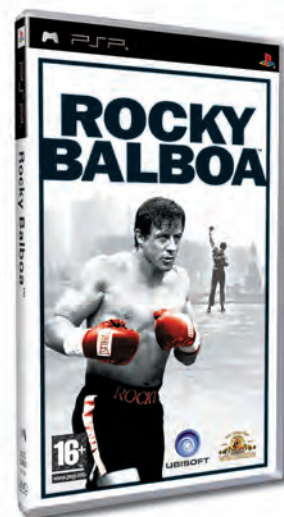


Is **Duke Nukem Forever** finally coming out? Amazon UK listed the game as a pre-order recently, but the posting doesn't reflect on other Amazon sites. Still, it's pre-order so if you get it now, but by the time the game comes out, with inflation, it should mean you get it at a steal!



The future of gaming is mobile, not consoles. That's according to I-play boss **David Gosen** in a speech he gave recently, saying "the mobile phone will be the ultimate mass market gaming device, rendering console as the platform for a niche audience".

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## CONSOLE WATCH

**M**ICROSOFT'S PETER MOORE IS pretty damn proud of the 360, and he doesn't hold back from saying so. In a recent interview, he even went so far as to make it clear that there is nothing about the PS3 that he really wants. "The PS3, I really don't know what I would look at there that we're really missing. I look at the games and I feel really good at where we stand from a portfolio point of view. The online service, they're still trying to get it up to speed and there's nothing really there that I can really point to that I wish we had." He's not that jealous of Nintendo's Wii either, although he does admit he's "certainly a big fan" of the approach Nintendo is taking, saying it's "what Nintendo needs to do."

Peter is also not giving up on Japan it seems, and *Gears of War* managed to crack the top 10 best-sellers list in Japan quite unexpectedly. This follows the success of 360-exclusive *Blue Dragon*, although Microsoft still has an uphill battle in Japan with its console. "I think we need to continue to be a competitor as aggressively as we have been since the day we launched [in Japan]," Moore said. Microsoft is also planning to launch the 360 in China soon, according to sources. Microsoft is also checking with the Chinese government, including the culture and information ministries, that authorities are comfortable with the product, the sources said.

On a related note, the Xbox 360 HD DVD player has sold around 100,000 units in the US alone, according to the NPD Group. The add-on that lets 360 owners play HD DVD movies sold 42,000 units in its first month and another 50,000 in December. The HD DVD add-on retails for \$200 in the US. Time Warner CEO Richard Parsons is not convinced that consoles have any impact on the video format wars however, and said, "Do I think that the game console platform is really going to drive the conversion? I don't think so. People get those things to play games, not watch movies." Time Warner's movie studios are currently backing both HD DVD and Blu-ray, and are even working on a concept disc that contains both formats, the Total HD Disc.

Sony isn't as enamoured with the Wii as Microsoft, it seems. SCEA spokesperson Dave Karraker is adamant that the Wii doesn't belong in the same category as the PlayStation 3, declaring that the "Wii could be considered an impulse buy." Considering that the Wii has sold over 4.4 million units worldwide already (compared to the 1.3 million PlayStation 3s and 10.4 million Xbox 360s), a lot of impulse purchasing is happening at the moment.

All three console giants have their hands full with a new lawsuit though. A Texas-based investment firm is suing Microsoft, Nintendo and Sony over alleged infringement of a controller-related patent involving analogue-to-digital control. Despite this, Nintendo expects a bumper year, with Reuters reporting that Nintendo believes it'll make more money this year than even it expected. The company has raised its profit estimates by 28% to \$1.5 billion, more than doubling the leftovers from the last fiscal year. Nintendo is planning to sell 21 million Wii games this year.



## MARCH CALENDAR

This month's release calendar was so full of goodies we had to list all the games on a separate page. Happy shopping!

### 2 MARCH

Rainbow 6 Vegas	PSP
Resident Evil 4	PC
Barbie in the 12 Dancing Princesses	PS2
Tortuga: Two Treasures	PC

### 7 MARCH

Red Star	PS2
Okami	PS2
Capcom Classics 2	PS2
Dancing Stage Supernova	PS2
Xiaolin Showdown	PS2
Lucinda Green's Equestrian Challenge	PS2
Samurai Warriors 2 Empires	PS2
All Star Fighters	PS2
Dragon Sister	PS2
Darwin	PS2
Party Carnival	PS2
Zombie Hunters	PS2
Zombie Virus	PS2
Eagle Eye Golf	PS2
Street Golfer	PS2
Raiden III	PS2
Forty 4 Party	PS2
Radio Helicopter	PS2
Soccer Life II	PS2
Steamboat Chronicles	PS2
Sid Meier's Pirates!	PSP
Warriors	PSP
Capcom Puzzle Word	PSP
God Hand	PSP
Xiaolin Showdown	PSP
Ygo GX Tag Battle	PSP
Winx Club: Join the Club	PSP
Rengoku 2	PSP
Toca Race Driver 3 (Platinum)	PSP
Jade Empire: Special Edition	PC
Yu Gi Oh: Online Duel Evolution	PC
Malestrom	PC
Lucinda Green's Equestrian Challenge	PC
Armed Assault	PC
Tony Hawk Project 8	PSP
War Front: Turning Point	PC
The Hustle: Detroit Streets	PSP
Dungeons and Dragons: Tactics	PSP
Asterix and Obelix XXL	PS2
Black Buccaneer	PS2
Alpha Teens on Machines	PS2
An American Tail	PS2
WWF Safari	PS2
Casper School	PS2
Championship Manager 07	PS2
Diner Dash	PSP
300: March to Glory	PSP
Zendoku	PSP

Championship Manager 07	PSP
Championship Manager 07	360
Legend of the Dragon	PS2, PSP
Sega Rally	PC
Sega Rally	360
Virtua Tennis 3	360, PSP, PC
Full Auto 2	PSP
Sonic the Hedgehog	PS3

### 9 MARCH

Scrabble 2007	PC
Stacked	PC
Fast and Furious: Tokyo Drift	PS2

### 15 MARCH

Ghost Rider	PS2, PSP
NBA Street: Home Court	360

*Pre-order for only \$259.95*

### 16 MARCH

Bullet Witch	360
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### 23 MARCH

Asphalt 2	PSP
Silent Hunter 4	PC

*Pre-order for only \$257.36*

Guitar Hits 2006	PSP
Harley Davidson	PC, PS2
Pimp My Ride	360
Pimp My Ride	PS2
Shrek Smash 'n' Crash	PSP
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles	PS2, PSP
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles	PC, 360
Virtua Tennis 3	PS3
Virtua Fighter 5	PS3
Full Auto 2	PS3
Motostorm	PS3
Ridge Racer 7	PS3
Resistance: Fall of Man	PS3
Formula One Champion Edition	PS3
Genji: Day of the Blade	PS3
Hellboy	PS3
Fatal Inertia	PS3
Bladestorm: The 100 Years of War	PS3

### 30 MARCH

Ghost Recon: Advanced Warfighter 2	PC, PSP
Ghost Recon: Advanced Warfighter 2	360

*Pre-order for only \$519.95*

Prince of Persia: Rival Swords	PSP
Rayman Raving Rabbids	360
Call of Duty 3: Road to Victory	PSP
Cabela's Africa Safari	360
Guitar Hero 2 (Bundle with Guitar)	360, PS2

*Pre-order for only \$599.95*





3/4

**NAG FUN FACT:**  
Videogames  
were invented  
by the Mayans  
in 1212, when  
a meteor hits  
earth.

10/11

**EVENT:** Mayhem Competition  
([www.langames.co.za](http://www.langames.co.za))

17/18

24/25

**EVENT:** Mayhem Open LAN  
([www.langames.co.za](http://www.langames.co.za))

5

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## MIKTAR'S MEANDERINGS NEVER-ENDING FANTASY

By Miktar Dracon

I KNOW EXACTLY WHEN IT happened, actually. You see, I was running around, underground, in some prisons. I'd been caught stealing some treasure from the palace, right? But then I bumped into princess "I told everyone I killed myself," and we teamed up, but then got caught. Inside the prison we found that one soldier guy who supposedly killed the king, but didn't really because he has a <spoiler>. The problem is that the amazing knight we just saved didn't want to accept weapons for some reason, even though there were tons of armour and weapons lying around. No, jackass knight just HAD to run around in his underwear, attacking things with his fists. Like electricity. He'd run up and punch electric spiders in the face, and then die. It happened right about there, you see. Right there, when I realised I was shouting at some dumb character in a game. I had fallen in love with *Final Fantasy XII*.

Give me a second to explain. See, I played *Final Fantasy I* through *VII*, right, but I absolutely hated *VIII*. Didn't like it one bit. Thought it was too pompous, 'prancy' and pretentious (even for a *Final Fantasy*). Then *IX* came along and I loved that one, though people just accuse me of liking it because the lead character was a monkey. I'm not sure how that works out, but I let them believe what they will.

*Final Fantasy X* came along, and I thought the series had lost its damn marbles. *X* was crap, it really was. *XI* ended up being a damn MMO, and while I'm not one to complain about getting more MMOs, what I don't want to have is a *Final Fantasy* MMO that's really damn crap. And so, when I heard about *XII*, I didn't want to hear about it.

But now, we have this guy in the office who got it from overseas, and told me it's really damn cool. The dude isn't usually a nut job, so I figured I'd give it a look-see. I imported a copy (since PAL wasn't out yet, and I have an NTSC PS2), and after a ten-day wait, got down to some Fantasying in the Final.

I was shocked to find that it wasn't crap. Look, when you review a game it's -important-, y'know. People -care- about reviews, so you gotta try and say the right things, and let them know what they need to know. Y'dig? But when you review a game you can't really say what you -really- want to say. You can't just go, 'ZOMG, THIS EFFING ROXXORS!11ELEVEN', no matter how much you want to. But thankfully for me, a Column is an entirely different affair, isn't it? In this column I'm not constrained by the constraints of good common sense and overbearing rational. No. Here, I can tell you that I damn well think the game rocks, and it has revived my faith in the *Final Fantasy* series.

It's hard to explain exactly why the game is so damn slick, half-naked men aside. The fancy-pants Gambit System really changes the nature of things, and I think it's for the better. Now,

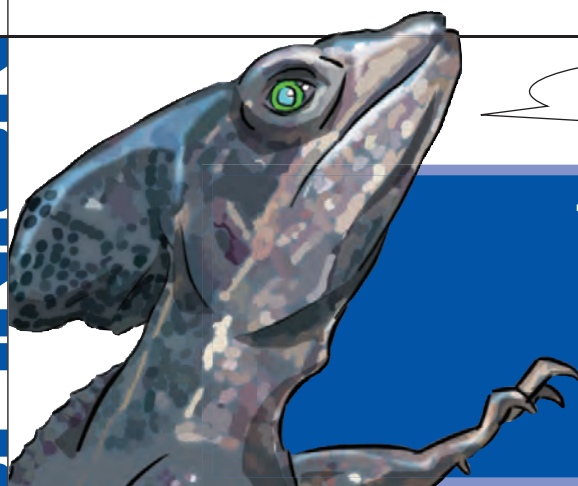
BUT WHEN YOU REVIEW  
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FOR ME, A COLUMN IS  
AN ENTIRELY DIFFERENT  
AFFAIR, ISN'T IT?

it's almost as if you're the manager of the Final Fantasy Sports Team. You set up some conditions, 'programming' your characters basically, to do certain things when certain things happen. Take your healer for example; you set up the condition that if anyone in your team has less than 20% health then this character has to cast Cure on them. Voila, case closed, and this frees you up to pay more attention to what's going on, instead of hawking at your characters' health bars. The designers were clever though. Many boss fights were designed to break your clever little Gambits, forcing you to do some hands-on manual intervention.

And it's pretty, really. The PlayStation 2 has a lot of life left in it, regardless of what Sony might try to tell you. The cut-scenes are Square-Enix for crying out loud; they're -always- fine. So, as a *Final Fantasy*, things went right for once I believe, and now I'm 13 hours into a game (the end nowhere in sight) and utterly pleased with myself for having managed to waste so much time, doing something I enjoy. Be sure to come back next month when I'll tell you in the review of the game that it sucks, and is nothing but trite unmitigated derivative hackneyed trash. **NAG**







ALL IN!!!!

## THE DOMAIN OF THE BASILISK

# POKER: THE FUTURE OF E-SPORTS

By Anton Lines

**T**ELEVISED COMPUTER GAMING MAY only just be emerging in the western market (see this month's multiplayer news), but something quite close to it already became a phenomenon several years ago. Professional Poker is, in a way, the halfway mark between electronic and physical sports. It's in the same basic category as chess and go, but faster, more variable, and more action packed. It's a game of skill, strategy, luck and psychology, sharing all of these attributes with computer games. In fact, a significant number of former professional e-sportsmen, including the famous *Quake III* player Lakerman, have hung up their mice and keyboards in favour of a deck of cards.

Yes, Poker has been around for much longer than I've been alive, but the sudden explosion in its popularity can be put down to one thing: the Internet. Millions of people now play the game online, and a player base of that size creates a very solid foundation for the emergence of professionals. And I'm not talking about people who gamble for a living. I'm talking, specifically, about sportsmen who compete for points and make their money from tournament winnings, endorsements and sponsorships. Exactly the same thing as I'm hoping will happen with Quakers and Counter-Strikers.

Since moving to the UK, I've been watching a lot of televised Poker. Sure, I'd seen the occasional World Series final on DStv back in South Africa, but here there's just so much of it on that I could watch for several hours a day if I wanted to. It's absolutely enthralling viewing, for a number of reasons. And I think e-sports would do well to learn from its surprising success.

Firstly, while Poker isn't the most complicated of games, there's still a lot you have to explain to someone who's never played it before. This, of course, is also one of the biggest problems facing televised computer gaming. So how do the Poker leagues ensure that their audiences can easily follow the action? The brief explanation sequence at the beginning of the show is rather unhelpful. It

THE FOCUS IS  
ON CREATING  
PERSONALITIES  
THAT THE  
AUDIENCE CAN  
IDENTIFY WITH.  
EMPATHISING  
WITH THE THRILL  
OF VICTORY OR  
THE ACHE OF  
DEFEAT LIES AT  
THE CORE OF  
THE REASON WE  
FIND ANY SPORT  
EXCITING.

goes by too quickly and doesn't explain the nuances that really make Poker great to watch. Instead, the most effective way to learn the rules is to follow the natural progression of the game. Some people will pick it up in a few hands; others will take hours.

But there has to be something keeping viewers interested while they learn, and this is one thing televised Poker does extremely well. By clearly displaying each player's chip count, as well as the size of the blinds, it becomes simple to keep track of who's winning and by how much. More importantly, with each hand the audience is kept apprised of the odds, and when an unlikely situation suddenly turns into a win, they know enough to share in the excitement.

This excitement, naturally, is crucial to the viewing experience. And this is the second thing Poker does right. The focus is on creating personalities that the audience can identify with. Empathising with the thrill of victory or the ache of defeat lies at the core of the reason we find any sport exciting.

Gaming can take both of these feathers out of Poker's cap. Current video streams fail with mainstream audiences because the poor fools have no idea who's even winning. Score displays are dismally inadequate, sometimes only shown at sporadic intervals (*Counter-Strike*), and other times so small that they're invisible anyway (yes, I'm looking at you, *Quake 4*). Since the games themselves were not created with television in mind, whoever broadcasts them will have to add a simple, easy-to-read scoreboard overlay of their own. Once that's taken care of, far more attention needs to be given to the players themselves, their personalities, their taunts and banter. As much as we all love computer games, when it comes to sports we'll always care more about people than pixels. **NAG**







# DAMMIT SURVIVING THE POWER CUTS

By Megan Hughes

*"Eskom has warned that parts of the country may be without power, as it is experiencing a high number of generating unit outages and would have to cut power supply, following a higher demand for electricity than expected. The energy supplier said in order to maintain the balance between demand and supply, mandatory 'load shedding', meaning power cuts, would be implemented countrywide, as and when required."*

– www.news24.co.za.

**W**ELL, IF THE NEWS reports are anything to go by, and they generally are, we're all going to be experiencing the ever entertaining power cuts more regularly throughout this year. Why Eskom didn't implement its 'load shedding' strategy years ago is beyond me. Especially when you consider how much fun it is to be suddenly without any power... and no idea how long it will be until you get it back. Though no one can blame you now for not doing the work you're paid to do; there's very little you can do without a bit of electricity.

And so, I thought I might enlighten you on how to survive in these new and frustrating times. You might want to copy the following tips and keep them on you at all times so you can draw on my wisdom wherever your travels may take you.

## TOP 10 SURVIVAL TIPS:

- 1. Always keep candles and matches or a lighter in an easily accessible** (in the dark) place in your home/office. Preferably kept out of the reach of small or stupid children.
- 2. Learn to use a library.** It's likely that you will need to access the kind of information that has readily been available to you through the Internet, but without power the Internet is not really an option. Libraries are those places with books. Books are collections of paper with words (and sometimes pictures) printed on their pages. Think of a book as a Website that has been printed.
- 3. Write down the home and postal addresses of your friends.** If you don't have any, just pretend and use your own address. Without electricity your cellphone battery will eventually become flat and you may lose contact with your friends. With nothing better to do, you can use your time to write cute little notes to your friends (probably by candle-light).
- 4. Take up chess.** This time-consuming game (yes that's right, a game that doesn't require a computer or console) will take you ages to set up and hours to master. Play with a friend or, if you are without any, play against yourself for double the frustration.
- 5. Learn to play an instrument.** Without any CD players or radios to use, unless you want to run your car battery flat, learning a new instrument will bring music into your life again. If you're not musically inclined, it might bring angry neighbours into

**WHY ESKOM DIDN'T  
IMPLEMENT ITS  
'LOAD SHEDDING'  
STRATEGY YEARS  
AGO IS BEYOND ME.  
ESPECIALLY WHEN  
YOU CONSIDER  
HOW MUCH FUN IT  
IS TO BE SUDDENLY  
WITHOUT ANY  
POWER... AND NO  
IDEA HOW LONG IT  
WILL BE UNTIL YOU  
GET IT BACK.**

your life too, but view this as an opportunity to meet new friends (especially if you were playing chess by yourself).

- 6. Get a pet dog.** These strange creatures never need to be plugged in and charged, though they do need food once in a while, and they are always available to play. Having a dog will give you something to do to pass the time. Try taking the animal for a walk or playing fetch (yet another game that doesn't require a console or computer). Amazing.
- 7. Take up Sudoku.** This puzzle is annoyingly simple yet surprisingly time-consuming and will happily eat up the hours that you'd normally spend in front of the television. You might be missing your favourite programme, but at least you're exercising your brain.
- 8. Eat sushi.** Without any power, cooking your food is no longer an option, so you might as well eat it raw. *[Erm, doesn't sushi require cooked rice? - Ed]*
- 9. Go to the bank.** You've got lots of time to waste and you can't do any Internet banking, so you might as well go stand in the queue and find out exactly what a bank looks like from the inside.
- 10. Create a puppet show.** Your neighbours/work colleges are just as bored as you are and they'll really appreciate the entertainment. Go on, makes some friends.

Well, girls and boys, I hope we all learnt something new today. Try these fun things out at home or at work. And remember, Eskom only 'load sheds' because they care! **NAG**







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# S.T.A.L.K.E.R.

## SHADOW OF CHERNOBYL

**This isn't what you're used to. There is no structure, no introductory paragraph dropping hints at what might follow, or any 'funny' anecdotes about radiation or mutant programmers. There's a reason for this altered structure and you can read about it under Sandbox FPS when you get there, or you can flip to the last page of this preview feature and start there. It doesn't matter where you start or stop or how much you read - It's all up to you.**

### HOW IT GOT TO BE HERE

NAG was originally invited to cover *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.* a few months ago in the Ukraine, but this fell through for reasons we can only guess. We even had a big cover feature lined up for this event and it was a general disappointment, as travelling to the actual place where the Chernobyl disaster occurred would have been a sweet trip. The radiation has all been cleared up now, right? Then all things *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.* related went quiet and THQ (the publisher) started pimping *Supreme Commander* (you might remember the cover we ran a month or two back). At the time we thought that *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.* had been delayed again and cancelled our article and cover plans for it permanently (there's only so much messing around a gaming magazine will take). Sometime early January we received another invitation, this time to London to get a little time with the game. What to do? Well, we felt like a London trip (haven't been for a while) and fortunately for the people at THQ our selfish need for shopping won in the end and we agreed to take a good long hard look at a game that's been receiving a little negative press these days for being so delayed.



## WHY IT'S SO LATE

*S.T.A.L.K.E.R.* (announced late 2001) first started attracting attention early in 2002. It was originally called *Oblivion Lost* and described as a team-based, tactical FPS. Since then, many rumours and announcements have made their way to the gaming press including numerous delays, staff reductions, the publisher pulling financial support and so on. It's been on the verge of release for a while and now finally it's definitely coming (pending a nuclear disaster). We managed to corner the developer's PR guru and asked the question on everyone's mind, "why is it so late?" These are the reasons we were given:

- 1. Volume and scope of the game.** The world players experience in *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.* is expansive and dynamic (not just a PR term but a reality in the game) and this apparently takes time to pull off well. Proof of the volume of game on offer here should be apparent as you work your way through these pages.
- 2. Artificial-Life.** 'A-Life', as coined by the developer, is an integral part of the dynamic world players find themselves in. It's a living and breathing ecology that shapes the way the player experiences the game. It's very complex and must work flawlessly to be effective and was also implicated as a culprit for the delays. A-Life is discussed in a little more detail elsewhere in this article.
- 3. Story.** The third and final reason is the story. You can almost consider it feature creep as the game was originally designed to be just random without a story linking everything. The developer (GSC) then decided to add a story element further contributing to the delay.

If you work at a publication (magazine or Website) that involves gaming and technology you'll quickly discover that the journalists who work there are an unforgiving and uncompromising bunch, tearing entire games apart based only on an announcement press release or some leaked news. They're not easy to impress and woe betide the game that gets delayed or doesn't feature something the developer mentioned as unique when speaking about it for the first time. So you can imagine all the negativity levelled at *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.* for being delayed so long. One can read comments of how great it would have looked if it was released three years ago (implying it looks rubbish now) and how GSC have lost the plot all over the Internet. But this is just how the gaming press works and you'd be better off ignoring all of it. The best option really is to judge for yourself. Recently *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.* has been receiving some excellent coverage and it's only when you play the game that you realise that it is rather unique and should be a long and memorable experience.





## WHO WE SPOKE TO

The two people who demonstrated all the goodness of *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.* was Oleg Yavorsky (PR at Ukraine-based GSC Game World) and Guy Cunis (PR at THQ). Their plan was to have Guy playing the game while Oleg explained what was happening on the screen. This setup worked perfectly, unlike those croaky game demonstrations at E3 where bleary-eyed developers end up feeding you their pitch while being distracted by playing the game. With Guy and Oleg the action played out on the screen smoothly with running commentary and a few ad-hoc Q&A sessions coming from behind. This interaction proved fruitful as questions were answered in-depth without the game interrupting the proceedings.

## DEEPER MEANING

One of the more unusual comments we came across while speaking to Oleg was a personal statement about the game being a message to the world about the dangers of nuclear power and messing with nature. The disaster at Chernobyl happened when he was eight years old and living only a hundred kilometres from the explosion. It had a profound effect on him back then and is something that he's subtly trying to put across in the game without it ending up as a sermon. There's much more going on in this game than meets the eye, and it ends up being a strange blend of fact and fiction surrounding one of the worst nuclear disasters ever.

## THE DEVELOPER

GSC Game world is putting the game together and THQ is distributing it internationally. GSC is also famous for the *Cossacks* series and more recently *Heroes of Annihilated Empires*. There's no need to list the accomplishments of THQ as they simply put the game on retail shelves around the world.

## SETTING

Date: 2012. The game plays out in the Zone (the Chernobyl exclusion zone), a 30 square kilometre area that surrounds the infamous Chernobyl nuclear power plant, including the town of Pripyat and a great number of countryside dwellings such as barns, small holdings and military outposts. It's set in the near future and details a mysterious second explosion at the plant, increased anomaly activity in the area and the expansion of the zone. Essentially it's you in a barren irradiated world with mutant creatures, other *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.s* (friendly and unfriendly), military factions, bandits and deadly Anomalies all vying for dominance. The playable area is massive and features both indoor and outdoor areas with not a single concrete corridor in sight.

You play as a *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.* (Specially Trained in Artefact, Life form and Kinetic Energies Retrieval). Essentially you're a treasure hunter (artefacts), bounty hunter and information collector for traders, scientists and other interested parties. These covert activities pay good dividends that can be used for upgrading equipment (thereby allowing for deeper exploration into the zone) or that private strip of beachfront property in Barbados. This constant upgrading and subsequent increased range and ability of your character can be loosely linked back to the classic space trading simulation *Elite*, and games like it, but only just. The sense of freedom and openness on offer here is further enhanced with an unusual environment (in terms of location and artistic direction) and the distinct sense that you're exploring a new frontier.



## STORY

You've got amnesia and that's all you can remember. You also have an urge to (everyone together now) discovered your past... Soap opera clichés aside, there's more to the story here and while the real fun is really exploring the game, accepting missions and doing what S.T.A.L.K.E.R.s do best, there is the small matter of your PDA. You're found close to death at the side of the road and your PDA indicates your intention is/was to kill someone named 'The Gunslinger'. It's all a mystery from this point forwards, and as you make your way through the game you'll receive clues that help in your quest to find this person and perhaps, if you're lucky, who you are. This is the mainline plot in the game, which you can choose to follow if you like or not. In true RPG style, by talking to other game characters, you'll be given side missions and objectives that you can also choose or not. These missions will help in accumulating cash, discovering more about the zone you play in, or simply gain a friendly alliance with another S.T.A.L.K.E.R. clan. The developer also confirmed several secret areas, so thorough exploration will pay off eventually. Again, the point here is simple: it's up to you to decide how you want to play the game. The world is unbreakable and you can dip into the story whenever you like. One last thing; the game is also open-ended and has seven different possible endings. If they're all really mind blowing and considering that no game will ever play the same, *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.* might prove to be worth playing through a few times.



The town of Pripjat today







## ROLE-PLAYING

In almost every item of news or preview on *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.*, the acronym RPG has been dropped in. Almost immediately the game does present RPG elements such as having a detailed inventory (you can pick up anything from tinned meat to armour piercing rounds) that you can manage, as well as belt slots that artefacts can be inserted into that boost your attributes. There's no levelling up as such unless you count buying better equipment, and the collection process doesn't devolve into collecting hundreds of different types of boots and daggers and then travelling back to 'town' to sell them. It's more sensible. You'll only pick up things like weapons, ammunition, food and if you're lucky, an artefact or two. Another strong RPG element comes into play when dealing with the game's non-playing characters (military factions, bandits, traders and other *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.*s). When engaging in conversation with these characters, you'll often have branching conversation tree options that will put them on your side, make them angry or remain neutral. This has a bearing on the game as you can align with different *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.* factions and depending on how you conduct yourself, they will view you as either friendly, hostile or neutral. This can then either help you or hinder you as you progress through the game. Annoy too many people and you'll have trouble moving freely around the game. If you're accommodating and friendly you might end up with a few fellow *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.*s covering your back while you take down the bad guys. You have a persistent reputation in the game and this will dictate how you are received when dealing with other non-player characters. The important thing is that it's entirely up to you, and regardless of your type of action or inaction, the game world will continue along just fine with or without you.

## A-LIFE

It's a system of life simulation and can be accurately described as the glue that holds everything together in the game – well, a large part of it anyway. You've got a dangerous environment to explore, other non-player characters to interact with, places to visit and things to do. Under normal circumstances this wouldn't be very interesting if the game ran on rails and everything was scripted based on your current progress and particular location. To combat this problem, and also one of the reasons why the game is so delayed, A-Life was created. It's a system that controls everything in the game that lives and breathes. It also ensures that no two games of *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.* will play out in the same way. The second you start playing there are hundreds of other characters (from fellow *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.*s to mutant dogs) in the game world that are going about their daily business. Your presence in the game alters this life cycle just because you're there. This change isn't for better or worse, it's just a change and things will react to your presence or they won't. Groups of creatures roam the land and attack each other, and clans of other *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.*s work together or against each other. On the surface this might seem random, but should you decide to kill a pack of mutant dogs, for example, it might have larger ramifications later... They might have originally wandered into an enemy camp and inadvertently killed a few bad guys thereby making your job that much easier and now that they're dead this won't happen. There's an ongoing persistent life cycle happening in the game world and you're just a visitor.





## HANDS-ON

After the presentation and play demonstration we were allowed some exclusive hands-on time with the game to see for ourselves (this lasted for about three hours until we had to be forcibly removed from the THQ boardroom). Our personal crusade was to test the system of being able to accomplish tasks in different ways and gauge the various outcomes. After playing for about half an hour, the perfect situation presented itself. The idea was to get from one side of a hill to the other. The top was fenced off, so simply climbing over it wasn't an option, and running along the top to try and climb through a railway bridge would involve deadly exposure to a bunch of soldier types at the bottom. There were two different ways to tackle this problem. First up was to simply shoot our way through a heavily guarded blockade that was located at the entrance to a tunnel through the hill. This whole exercise proved pointless with the limited weapons we had at the time, and while it did yield numerous supplies from fallen soldiers, their sheer numbers and firepower soon overwhelmed. The other option was a puzzle of sorts that involved timing the pattern of some strange radioactive electrical anomaly to make it through a smaller drainage passage about a kilometre from the main entrance. This was much trickier, but after a few reloads the pattern was nailed and we were through. Admittedly, this is a rather simplistic example but gives a good idea of how open-ended the game is. A little further along in the game one could enlist the help of other S.T.A.L.K.E.R.s to take down some bandits or not, and then the option of a stealthy approach over a guns blazing one presented itself - and all of this in a single side mission.

## GRAPHICS

The X-Ray engine does a fine job of presenting large populated environments with trees and grass, buildings and bad guys. The weather changes as you play as well as a proper day and night cycle. But all the technical knobs and buttons don't make the game what it is from a graphical perspective. It's the location, the textures, the models and feel of the game that strikes a chord here. The artistic direction in S.T.A.L.K.E.R. takes its inspiration from the actual zone it represents and involved a number of trips to the Chernobyl area by the art team, and it shows in the presentation. The vehicles, objects, architecture and even the landscape all feel different from anything encountered before. In fact, everything on the screen feels unique and somehow different - the kind of different you can't describe it's just a certain feel. Perhaps this is because not many games come from that part of the world and inspiration taken from a world that is commonplace for the developers feels distinctly different and special when compared to the tried and tested look and feel almost all other shooters have.





## COMMUNITY [MULTIPLAYER AND SDK]

It's not any more exciting than anything else out there with traditional Deathmatch and Team Deathmatch game modes, but it has one interesting alternative called artefact hunt where players split into two teams and must find, secure and return as many artefacts back to their base as possible. There are some other unique selling points such as a ranking system that sees players improving their rank (there are four levels: experienced, professional, veteran and legend), and as you move up the ranks you'll gain access to better equipment. We didn't get to play any multiplayer while looking at the game, so this will need to be tackled in the final review. An SDK is also planned for the game after release so those people with too much time on their hands can make use of all the tools the developers used to put the game together. The A-Life system might prove interesting to fiddle with, so we might end up seeing some rather interesting modification for *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.* not long after its release.



## STUFF WE SHOULD MENTION AND THE PDA

There are some realistic elements up for grabs in *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.* involving your personal health, fitness and survival. On the health side, it's possible to get wounded and start losing blood (indicated by an icon on the right of the screen). If you're bleeding you're going to have to apply bandages (you find these when searching bodies) and top up your health. If you kill someone it's possible to search the body for treasure, and this can be anything from medical packs to ammunition. Watch out for worn-out weapons, however, as using a single gun for too long will cause it to deteriorate to the point where it'll jam and eventually stop working all together – more of an RPG dynamic but fresh in this genre. Radiation is also a potential killer, and when you get close to hot spots you'll hear the Geiger counter ticking away as your radiation level increases resulting in further loss of health. Drinking vodka, among other things, is one way to reduce the level of contamination. Some of the artefacts you collect and wear are also irradiated, and while they provide statistical benefits such as improved endurance, they also slowly drain your health away. The game also uses visibility and stealth meters to ensure you can keep track of how much noise you're making and how well the enemy can see you. This allows for stealthy attacks against the enemy, which can improve your odds in a fight. Although you have a nice inventory system for keeping track of all the goodies you collect while playing, it also has an effect on your movement and endurance. Carrying more than 40 kilograms of equipment really slows you down, so you'll have to choose carefully what you pick up and ensure your inventory is tightly managed.

You also have a PDA that keeps track of your current tasks as well as including a map, diary, list of contacts, your ranking, statistics and an encyclopaedia. Essentially it's your guide through the game seeing that there are so many dynamically generated missions you can have running at the same time. Remember, the PDA is your best friend out in the zone so please try and not get it wet or drop it somewhere.



## SANDBOX FPS

If you sum everything up, *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.* is an FPS survival action game with RPG elements set in a unique sandbox world. The game's life simulation technology takes care of the game world and the player simply exists there as a small part of a much bigger puzzle. Many of the missions are dynamically generated, ensuring all games will play differently. There's a story that you can choose to follow or not, or if you like you can spend your entire day killing wild boars and searching dead bodies for loot. If you're like most people, you would have started at the beginning of this article and worked your way to here, reading each block separately and moving through it like you're used to doing. A few might have flipped to the end and started with this box. If you did, then *S.T.A.L.K.E.R. Shadow of Chernobyl* is going to be the perfect game for you when it arrives in March. For the rest, those that dared to skip a box or two or just looked at the pictures, or went from beginning to end, you really need to play this game – it's going to change the way you play shooters or it won't, but that's all up to you. **NAG**





# PREVIEWS

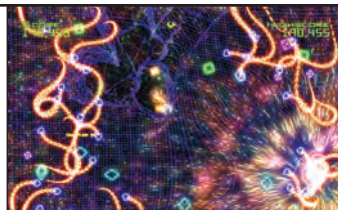
## BRING THAT BEAT BACK!

**A** LONG, LONG TIME AGO we played games (did it shock you to hear that?), and those games were good. We loved those games, and as the years went by we kept waiting for developers to finally remake those games for the newer generation of PC, or console, or handheld. But too many years have gone by, and still our hopes remain unfulfilled. We stopped believing in Santa Clause after the 10<sup>th</sup> year in a row that he ignored our requests, so now we're taking matters into our own hands. We have a cunning plan, which may involve kidnapping several developers and then forcing them to work for us on the games we'd like to see remade. Since this will most likely result in us going to jail once the police find our super-secret hideout, what games would you want to see remade for modern systems? Perhaps we can squeeze a few more out of the developers...

## BOOM BOOM ROCKET

DEVELOPER: Bizarre/EA PUBLISHER: Microsoft PLATFORMS: 360 GENRE: Rhythm RELEASE DATE: Q2 2007

**A**FTER THE SURPRISE HIT that was *Geometry Wars: Retro Evolved*, many of us were curious if Bizarre Creations was simply going to go back to making *PGR 4* or perhaps planning a sequel for the Xbox Live Arcade hit. The developer is working hard on the next *PGR*, but it has also signed a deal with EA to create a new title for the XBLA service. Called *Boom Boom Rocket*, the concept apparently comes from EA's casual game wing, Pogo.com, but the *Geometry Wars* creators are doing the development work. It's a rhythm game where you will have to release rockets to the beat of a song (all originally created by Ian Livingstone – [www.ianlivingstone.net](http://www.ianlivingstone.net)), causing fireworks to explode over a cityscape. Yes, some of you might think that that sounds a lot like *Phantavision* and you're right, but this appears to be an entirely different game.



## GEOMETRY WARS PC

DEVELOPER: Bizarre  
PUBLISHER: Microsoft  
PLATFORMS: PC (Vista)  
GENRE: Arcade  
RELEASE DATE: 2007

**B** EING THE HIT THAT it was, Microsoft has decided to send *Geometry Wars: Retro Evolved* to Vista. First announced at a keynote at CES, the game's demo was also available to play. It will be able to use a mouse, keyboard or controller as the means of input, but the demos appeared to have used controllers, so there's no telling how effective a mouse will be (a keyboard just won't do in our opinion). Price speculation is somewhere between the XBLA price and that of a budget PC game. It would have been nice if it was just a free game as part of Vista, but executives have kids to keep in boarding schools. A nice touch is that the game plays perfectly in a window, so getting some quick *GW* action in between work will be easy. Just don't let the boss catch you.

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## WHAT WE WANT (THEM TO REMAKE)...



### GOLDEN AXE

The world needs a return of the male warrior in blue, female warrior in red and male dwarf in green. Sure, the later sequels added in a puma-man, but it's the classics we're after here. Kicking those little magic-potion stealing munchkins remains a paramount obsessive compulsive disorder, because everyone played *Golden Axe* just to reach the 7<sup>th</sup> filled-in square for Magic Attack. C'mon developers, give us a next-gen *Golden Axe* complete with eyeball-shattering magical attacks! We've seen you do it with *Final Fantasy*.



### SIM ANT

It's about time this oft-overlooked gem gets a nice new remake, perhaps with some kind of ant-vision mode where you get to see the garden from the perspective and interpretation of the ant queen. It's the year 2007 now, and we're sure that modern systems could even allow for a much higher ant-count than the original allowed (which we remember being something like 20). Wasn't it fun building mazes for the little ants to run through?

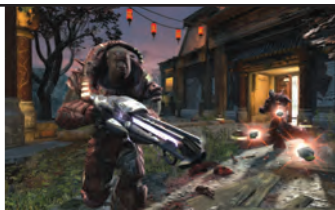




## SAVAGE 2: A TORTURED SOUL

**DEVELOPER:** S2 Games  
**PUBLISHER:** S2 Games  
**PLATFORMS:** PC  
**GENRE:** RTS/FPS  
**RELEASE DATE:** 2007

**S**AVAGE WAS A GREAT idea, but flawed in its implementation and it had a lot of bugs. Now, free and patched, the game has started to make waves among online PC gamers. After all, the idea of an FPS and RTS meeting each other in one game has always sounded great. But no one has managed this yet, though you can say *Savage* came very close. So close, in fact, that the sequel is definitely a game to keep an eye on. For one, the developers have been paying attention to the complaints from fans, bringing along a large amount of tweaks such as a persistent karma rating to weed out lousy team-killers and a better tech-tree for commanders. If you don't know yet, in *Savage* one player is the RTS-style commander while the other players are the actual units on the ground. *Savage 2* will also add RPG elements for players and teams alike. It looks good, too.



## UNREAL TOURNAMENT III

**DEVELOPER:** Epic  
**PUBLISHER:** Midway  
**PLATFORMS:** PC, 360, PS3  
**GENRE:** Action  
**RELEASE DATE:** 2007

**Y**ES, *UNREAL TOURNAMENT 3*, not 2007. Don't fear, though, since Epic still plans to release the game this year. Rumours have even flown around about a release being imminent, but the official date is later this year. So why the name change? It's actually the fourth *Unreal Tournament* game, so our guess is that it has to do with the Unreal Engine 3, which *UTIII* is using. Developed by everyone's currently darlings, Epic, it's what you'd expect: new weapons and vehicles, some gameplay tweaks and a fresh look. Publisher Midway, which is definitely not going to stop milking the franchise now, is throwing its weight behind it and even alludes to it being "the greatest multiplayer PC franchises ever created." Many fans will agree and the game is getting the full platform treatment. But when will it arrive? And do you have your DirectX 10 card yet? Unfortunately, no hint of a new *Unreal Championship* yet.



## MAELSTROM

**DEVELOPER:** KD Visions  
**PUBLISHER:** Codemasters  
**PLATFORMS:** PC  
**GENRE:** RTS  
**RELEASE DATE:** March 2007

**A** LIENS HAVE UNLEASHED AN ecological disaster upon Earth, killing most of the population. But they didn't get everyone and human survivors quickly rally into two groups. The Ascension are the rich folks, meddling with genetics and fancy lasers, while the Remnant prefer freedom and such to the imperial values of the Ascension and consequently need to scavenge for everything in the wasteland. Then the Hai-Genti, the aliens that started the mess, arrive to terraform the planet for themselves. If you are sensing the structures of a traditional RTS, you're not far off. So far *Maelstrom* doesn't seem that inspiring for its genre, but the developers were also responsible for the very creative *Perimeter*. Along with Codemasters, KD Visions might bring some of that creativity to a more traditional strategy title.



## THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: SHIVERING ISLES

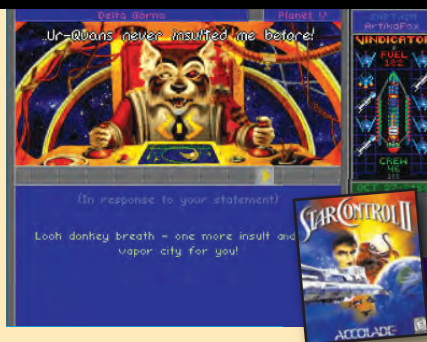
**DEVELOPER:** Bethesda  
**PUBLISHER:** Bethesda  
**PLATFORMS:** PC, 360  
**GENRE:** RPG  
**RELEASE DATE:** TBA

**F**EAR NOT, *OBLIVION* FANS. If expansions saved *Morrowind*, there's no chance they wouldn't appear for the latest *Elder Scrolls* game. The good news is that because *Oblivion* is already so good, an expansion can really just take things higher. To get rid of any ideas that this will just be a glorified download pack, *Shivering Isles* features 30 hours of new gameplay as players head off to stop a prince of madness and his plans. The game will feature 12 new creatures, as well as new items, ingredients, armour and so on. Apparently it's a whole new game world, thus making your *Oblivion* travels even broader. The expansion is heading towards the PC and 360 while a PS3 version has been mentioned, but Bethesda first wants to release the original game on the platform. No word about tweaks to the engine, such as a small visual upgrade, but we hardly need our arms twisted to spend more time with this game.



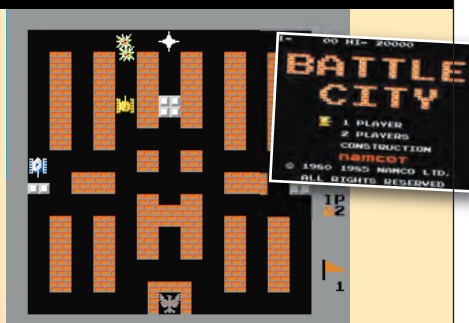
## SIM TOWER

This one keeps coming up in discussion, especially where James is concerned. Modern processing power could easily propagate every floor with little Sims, coming to work, going back home to their apartments and even grabbing a quick snack at the mall before getting stuck in a maze of endless elevators. Hell, let's just throw in full physics, so perhaps a Sim carrying a package to work might drop it, and you can watch its slow tumble down the 90 flights of stairs you built.



## STAR CONTROL 2

This is a complete no-brainer. *Star Control 3* just didn't do it for us, and the *Star Control 4* that eventually got cancelled didn't look like it was going to be anything like *Star Control 2* anyway. Let's face it: space exploration and discovery have never matched up to the sheer depth of experience the original *Star Control 2* offered with its cast of memorable characters and inexplicable vastness of space. It's time for a full-3D Spathi to tell us just how scary those bunny rabbits really are.



## BATTLE CITY

If you were or are a child of the 80s, then you should know *Battle City* (if you're a gamer, of course). Two stalwart tanks, you and a buddy, against the endless attacking army there to shoot your little eagle symbol. Power-ups could protect you, or make you stronger. We personally remain eternally thankful to that little shovel power-up that would change the wall around the eagle to impenetrable metal. Now, bring on the new era of *Battle City* developers, complete with map-making and online cooperative multiplayer!



# CRYSIS

**Developer:** Crytek Studios **Publisher:** Electronic Arts **Distributor:** EA South Africa **Genre:** FPS **Platforms:** PC **Release:** Q2 2007

IT MUST BE SOMETHING in the European air that causes the various developers situated there to habitually develop games involving the tropics. Crytek itself, a 115-strong team of developers from around 20 different nations, is not exempt from this phenomenon. Its first title, *Far Cry*, was junglelicious, rising from the depths of Crytek's original GeForce 3-powered dinosaur-hunting CryENGINE techdemo. Suffice to say, *Far Cry* was an unmitigated success: the open-ended approach to scenarios and fiendishly intelligent gun-toting jungle soldiers made for an intense playground. We're quite shocked nobody ever made a Rambo modification for it.

Now it's back to the jungle with *Crysis*. Instead of an *Island of Dr. Moreau* scenario, the player is tasked with repelling an alien invasion and saving humankind. The year is 2020, and lead protagonist Jack Dunn must use his Delta Force training to investigate a meteorite crash on the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea. The North Koreans make things a bit difficult by also getting in on the action and generally not being diplomatic about it. The game will follow three distinct acts. The first involves jungle combat, very reminiscent of *Far Cry*, as the player battles to reach the meteorite. The second act still plays out in the jungle, but now the entire island has been flash-frozen and screenshots certainly speak favourably of the effect. The third and final act will apparently take place on the alien ship with zero-G gameplay, though Crytek is

being very hush about it. You'll only get to see the aliens in the third act, according to reports.

*Crysis* has a lot going for it so far on top of its open-ended structure. Every weapon can be modified and Jack himself has a rather spectacular US Military prototype 'Nano Muscle Suit'. With it, you can reduce your movement noise, increase your speed, boost your jumping and strength, as well as treat your ouchies right on the battlefield. These actions are carried out on the fly via a radial selection, but also deplete the rechargeable energy reserves of the suit. Basically, you can boost your speed, run past several enemies, boost your strength so as to jump on top of a roof, punch through the corrugated metal sheets, and then drop down death onto enemies below. Most players will develop their own play style with the suit's abilities, which is sure to lead to some interesting situations.

All this fun (and more) is brought together by the new and improved CryENGINE2, which makes *Crysis* one of the first DirectX 10 Vista-capable games. Among the enhancements are volumetric clouds, real-time ambient maps, depth of field, motion blur, dynamic soft shadow whatchamacallits, and HDR lighting. Sunrise and sunset are included, along with the dubious sounding subsurface scattering. You'll probably have to upgrade for this one. **NAG**

## MULTIPLAYER

*Crysis* flavours its 32-player capable multiplayer with a few spices. The four modes, Tactical Deathmatch, Tactical Team Deathmatch, Tactical Capture the Flag and Power Struggle, all involve full use of the Nano Muscle Suit as well as weapon customisation. Power Struggle is an entirely new mode, and features a form of economics so as to unlock weapons and vehicles. As the match progresses, new research unlocks equipment and alters the balance of the game. At the start of Power Struggle, you spawn as a standard US or North Korean grunt. As you rack up kills and achieve goals such as securing capture points, you earn credits with which to buy bigger guns and more abilities for your suit. The HQ you must defend is armed with

automated missile launchers and turrets, removing the need for base camping. A host of vehicles are available in all the multiplayer modes, including VTOL jets, trucks, jeeps, and attack helicopters. You'll be able to produce these as you capture zones. An interesting feature is the vehicle purchase key code. When you purchase a vehicle and it pops out from manufacture, your PDA is sent a personal key code with which only you can then take the vehicle. The aliens feature briefly in multiplayer in the form of crash sites, where you can retrieve cores and reverse engineer alien weapons from it.

In multiplayer, every two hours of game time equals one *Crysis* day, with full day/night cycling.



## THE WEAPONS

A man in a jungle is only as good as his guns. Thankfully, Jack seems prepared and even capable of using his hands to great effect. You'll also be able to pick up enemy weapons.

**Hands:** Thanks to the strength modifier, players will be able to pick up things and toss them into enemies, punch through metal walls and even grab an enemy by the neck to use as a human shield. Much better than just straight punching, we think.

**SCAR:** The SOF Combat Assault Rifle is the standard issue for *Crysis*, modifiable into a sniper rifle or Close-Quarter-Combat rifle. Special ammunition can be loaded such as incendiary rounds, 'tag' bullets that let you track an enemy as well as remotely triggered tranquilisers.

**XM102:** A shoulder-mounted rocket launcher, fun for the whole family, capable of taking out tanks, helicopters and other vehicles.

**XM2014:** Stock-standard and reliable shotgun that includes reflex sight, targeting laser or tactical flashlight additions.

**MPXA:** Silencer-capable submachine gun, also able to take a flashlight or targeting laser.

**EM70:** The developers call this one an "Anti-Vehicle Rifle," and it's capable of shooting metal slugs electromagnetically at Mach 8. We're curious to see what it'll do to human enemies.

**Fragmentation Grenade:**  
Always a crowd pleaser.

**Handheld Gatling gun:**  
Apparently you'll only be able to use this destructive toy once your power suit has hit maximum level.





# GOD OF WAR II

**Developer:** SCEI **Publisher:** SCEE **Distributor:** Ster Kinekor Games [011] 445-7960 **Genre:** Action **Platform:** PS2 **Release:** 27 April 2007



THE DEMO OPENS WITH Kratos, now the God of War after having 'offed' Ares in the first game, having a little tit-for-tat with Athena. Seems she doesn't like Kratos hanging out with his new Spartan buddies, going around and causing wars (isn't that what a God of War is supposed to do?). Kratos free-falls down to earth to go hang out with his pals, but Athena pops Kratos with some lightning god-beams and reduces him to human-size again (although he still has access to vast godly powers, much to our delight).

From there, the *God of War 2* demo fires up its engines to impress, and impress it does. The PlayStation 2 has a lot of power left, and nowhere is that more evident than when a massive Colossus statue starts punching holes through walls, trying to get to Kratos. The combat remains mostly unchanged from the previous game, although a little nip and tuck has been applied here and there, smoothing out the edges and polishing up the experience a little. Kratos's blades-on-chains weapon has been given a facelift of sorts; the arcing flames and sweeping trails are much more vibrant now, letting things pop out from the screen a bit more. Everything seems so drab and colourless these days on the next-gen consoles, it's almost refreshing to see a game that isn't afraid to go all neon on you just to make things look all that much cooler.

The combat system is as solid as it was before: weak/strong attacks let you chain together impressive combo strings liberally interspersed

with appropriately-timed slowdowns and pauses, adding that extra 'oomph' to the impacts. At first glance, *God of War 2* feels almost more like an awesome expansion pack, although to be fair, the demo presents a rather limited view of what we can expect from the final. Magic attacks make a return, though the demo only had the Lightning ability. One part of the demo involved a diet-puzzle where you have to kick a sliding block past a gate that slams shut if you move off a pad; nothing brain-bending but a welcome change of pace from the brutal action. As the action reaches climax (involving a rather spectacular scene where Kratos climbs up the gigantic statue to go ruin its pretty face), the 'press this button' mini-game makes a return. Timely presses of the button (shown onscreen) continue the action automatically, although again this means missing a bit of the spectacle because you're paying attention to what button flashes onscreen.

The demo includes a few new types of attacks; holding down one of the shoulder buttons expands the standard weak/strong attacks into a literal flurry of chain and blades - much like being a mobile blender. The results speak for themselves and the attacks are dubiously exhilarating to use. Beyond that, *God of War 2* appears to be everything we loved from the first game, tweaked with some beefed-up graphics and sound. Unfortunately for us, the demo itself was too damn short, with the disappointment in the silence after the 'thank you for playing' palpable from space. **NAG**







## VITAL INFO

## ■ Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

## ■ Developer

Funcom

## ■ Publisher

Eidos

## ■ Distributor

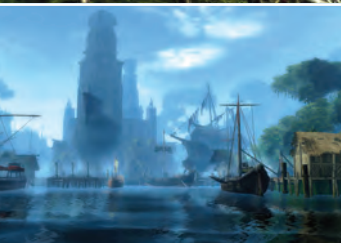
WWE [011] 462-0150

## ■ Genre

MMORPG

## ■ Release Date

2007



# AGE OF CONAN: HYBORIAN ADVENTURES

"HITHER CAME CONAN, THE Cimmerian, black-haired, sullen-eyed, sword in hand, a thief, a reaver, a slayer, with gigantic melancholies and gigantic mirth, to tread the jewelled thrones of the Earth under his sandalled feet." Back in the 1930s, American writer Robert E. Howard created a series of pulp fantasy stories that appeared in *Weird Tales* magazine, featuring the now iconic Conan the Barbarian. Now, almost 75 years later, Funcom is producing an MMORPG set in Conan's universe (specifically on the continent of Hyboria) with all its dark, gritty sword-and-sorcery. There may even be the lament of women, depending on the level of your character.

*Hyborian Adventures* has been in development since 2003, and despite several setbacks seems to have come a long way (and even managed to branch a version for the Xbox 360). Funcom is known for the successful science-fiction second-generation MMO, *Anarchy Online*, as well as the acclaimed adventure game *The Longest Journey*.

There are a few noticeable elements to *Hyborian Adventures* that already sets it apart from the current (and even upcoming) throng of MMO titles. The most poignant of these is that the game is actually split into two sections. The first section is a single-player affair that will still require you to be connected to the online servers, but won't involve other players at all. Using this, the player creates their character and then progresses through a slightly traditional single-player, role-playing escapade. Once that's over and done with (or sooner, depending on the player), that character can then be moved over to the online portion of the game for a more traditional

MMO experience. We can only assume that this is to ease in the newbies and give new players a chance to get to grips with the game before being subjected to the hordes of barbarians online, and their characters. The online portion of the game contains all the frills. Players can conquer territories, build cities and form guilds in the dynamic environment where both players and NPC characters are prone to marauding.

The second interesting facet is that of the 'Real Combat' system. Instead of the usual MMO standard of clicking on an enemy and then waiting for combat to resolve itself with minimal player interaction, *Hyborian Adventures* lets players direct the swings of their weapons via six separate target zones. Funcom hasn't elaborated on this idea much, but the general idea is clear: you literally attack enemies yourself, choosing the direction of the strike. By stringing together combinations of patterns of strikes, you can flurry your opponent to death or simply bash at their shield till it gives way. Or, you can keep trying to decapitate them.

Players will also be able to band together into formations where a commander temporarily gains some control over everyone in the unit, directing the battle as each member gains special attack and defensive bonuses. There is also promise of city vs. city combat involving massive siege operations and AI-controlled armies.

*Hyborian Adventures* has a lot going for it, especially if Funcom can deliver on the various promises made, although the mature nature of the game will certainly turn a few heads once the heads start rolling. **NAG**



# Performance and Value

## DirectX 10 Ready with Ghost Recon and GTI Racing Bundle

It takes a high-performance product to run today's sophisticated game titles. With the Vista operating system poised to change personal computing and digital home entertainment, a card that is ready for the revolution is something you should look into when shopping for a new graphics solution.

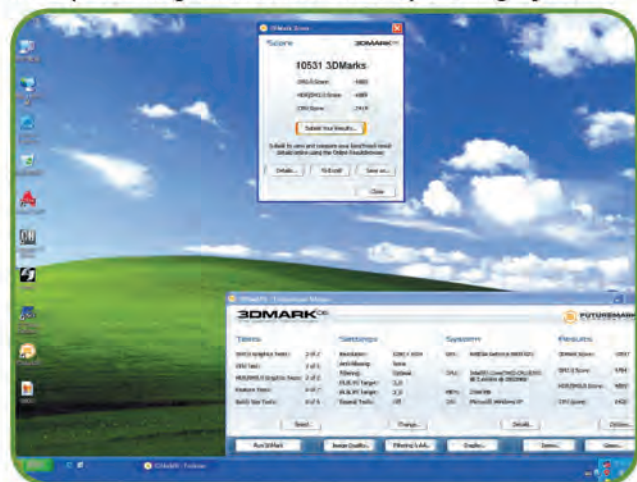


### Powerful Performance

The ASUS EN8800 series, which includes two models: EN8800GTX/HTDP/768M and EN8800GTS/HTDP/640M, will certainly solve the above issues. First of all, they are powered by Nvidia's latest GeForce 8800 GPUs. The former actually scored 10,531 in 3DMark06 at 1280x1024 resolution, which is more than fast enough to handle the hottest 3D games.

### DirectX 10 and Vista Ready

Second, both models of the EN8800 series are DirectX 10-ready and are fully-compatible with Shader Model 4.0, and enables efficient batch process of game objects and data. The result is far richer and more immersive gaming experience. DirectX 10 support also means compatibility with the up coming Microsoft Vista operating system.



▲ ASUS scores 10,531 on 3DMark06.

### 3D Games and Graphics Benchmark Tool Bundled

Since you're buying the card for games, what's better than getting two popular games right out of the box. The EN8800 series bundles Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter from Ubisoft and GTI Racing from Techland. 3Dmark06 Advanced Version, the premier graphics benchmark software, is also available with the purchase of the two new graphics cards. Whether it's for gamers or overclockers, the EN8800 series offers excellent value in return.

### Splendid Video Intelligence Technology

To make all images on your monitor look that much better, the EN8800 series incorporates Splendid Video Intelligence Technology, an exclusive feature found only on ASUS solutions. With Splendid, images enabled by ASUS graphics cards are fine tuned to deliver vibrant visual representations in conditions most favorable to the human eye. Splendid works on top of NVIDIA's PureVideo™ technology to offer sharp decoded video.

Just like what the headline said. The EN8800 series is a combination of high performance and getting the biggest bang for the buck. Please do check out the two new cards if you're looking to upgrade your computer setup.



## VITAL INFO

### Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	<b>PSP</b>
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

### Developer

Kuju

### Publisher

Vivendi

### Distributor

Midigital (011) 723-1967

### Genre

Action

### Release Date

March 2007



## M.A.C.H.

IN 2049, THE GOVERNMENTS of the world, in a rare and somewhat unexpected display of altruistic accord, declare the discontinuation and decommissioning of all manned combat aircraft in a bid to save lives (that were better spent in chunky bits strewn about minefields, presumably). All the orphaned super jets are left to weep oily tears and smoulder in scrap yards, and their pilots left to scratch a meagre living telling their tales of former glory in disreputable drinking holes. The years pass by, and – by dint of some fad or other – these jets reappear on the black market, only to be sold off at exorbitant rates. An enthusiast underground emerges – a sort of Flight Club, if you will – where ex-flyboys, smugglers and wealthy, bored hobbyists take their modded metal birds to the skies in an outlaw aerial battle of skill, speed, and big guns for the usual fame and fortune.

M.A.C.H. (or *Modified Air Combat Heroes*) is the PSP's very first combination air combat/racing game. As one of the game's eponymous heroes, players will rise through the ranks by defeating their rivals and unlocking all sorts of cool stuff to stick all over their jets, including wing-mounted cannons o' doom and speed-boosting afterburners.

The game features four gameplay modes. Arcade is a jump-in-and-fly mode, designed to toss players straight out into the action. Although only one aircraft will be initially available, more will be unlocked as the player progresses through the Career mode. This mode comprises a series of high-speed, high-octane tournaments spun out over a varied assortment of landscapes and environments, from sun-blasted canyons to lens-flared expanses of open sea. Here you'll play out your illustrious career from a snot-nosed Rookie, through Pro, Ace, Elite, and finally don the ostentatious gold-fringed mantle and 80's gold-rimmed aviator shades of a true Combat Hero. In doing so, you'll win yourself access to your defeated opponents' aircraft, and bag yourself some cash to pimp out your ride – and with 180 modification configurations across 11 planes on offer, there's more than enough shiny stuff to blow those hard-earned greenbacks on, and keep ahead of the competition. The Challenge mode trots out five daring and thrilling contests – the MACH melee, MACH Dash, Time Check, MACH Lap, and Dog Tag – over several different locations, in the quest to own the skies. M.A.C.H. also offers an impressive multiplayer mode, where up to eight players can dogfight via Game Sharing (with just one game copy), and Ad Hoc networks for some stratospheric deathmatch action.

The visuals looks pretty enough, with some funky and fairly detailed aircraft models and smokin' weapon effects. Overall, M.A.C.H. looks set to debut its genre in high-flying style. **NAG**







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## VITAL INFO

### Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

### Developer

Kyiv's Games

### Publisher

Deep Silver

### Distributor

Greenstone Interactive [021] 557-6248

### Genre

RPG

### Release Date

13 Apr 2007

# SILVERFALL

**Y**OU'VE PROBABLY NEVER HEARD of Kyiv's Games (also commonly referred to as KievGames for some inexplicable reason). The only other title under their belt, aside from the upcoming *Silverfall*, appears to be *Fire Department 3*, which we are assured was a rather sterling example of a fire-fighting strategy title.

*Silverfall*, however, doesn't involve fighting fires, though you may cast fireballs at something. It's an RPG, rather traditional in nature, but with some steam-punk thrown into the mix. The inhabitants of Nelwe, thanks to the invention of steam power, are rising up against the element wizards who used to keep order. In the meantime, the 'forces of darkness' are taking the opportunity to lay siege to the realms, trying to seize power.

Toting a vast, open fantasy universe with complete freedom, players journey around with two companions taking on hordes of creatures and bosses. Your companions are chosen from a group of eight, and the way you treat them will determine your relationship with them, which influences their usefulness in battle.

Apparently, your companions may even become romantically inclined towards you, or become your best friend for life. You create your own character from a choice of four races and even have access to a werebeast form. Over 130 skills and spells go towards your character's progression.

Multiplayer will be supported in the form of a cooperative mode, or a PvP mode for up to eight players. The cooperative mode involves creating your characters and partying up to tackle the story, or you can start a new game from scratch and evolve the characters of the party as you progress, working with what you are given instead of preselecting traits and abilities.

Visually *Silverfall* manages to stand on its own two feet, and some impressive ragdoll physics send monsters bouncing across the terrain, splayed against an eventual rock. By all accounts, *Silverfall* is shaping up to be a little bit *Titan Quest*, a dash of *Baldur's Gate* and perhaps a touch of *Dungeon Siege*, though only time will tell if it manages to combine these elements into something playable. **NAG**





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## VITAL INFO

### Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

### Developer

Iron Lore

### Publisher

THQ

### Distributor

WWE [011] 462-0150

### Genre

Action

### Release Date

TBA

# TITAN QUEST: IMMORTAL THRONE

**"A**ND WHEN ALEXANDER SAW the breadth of his domain, he wept for there were no more worlds to conquer, and no more weregoats to loot."

Well, dry those tears and heave a dripping carcass to Zeus's nearest altar, ye untiring Myrmidons, for the omnipotent bolt-thrower has seen fit to grace us with an expansion to last year's epic monster-munching excursion. *Titan Quest: Immortal Throne* offers devoted click and slashers a veritable buffet of new goodies, including ten additional character levels, and 30 new quests over 15 hours of gameplay at each difficulty level, while 20 new beasts are gambolling about, ready to throw themselves at your weapons and hand over 400 new items. There's a host of natty new affixes for weapons, new relics and charms, as well as mysterious and rare artefacts to create. Keep those peepers on the lookout for arcane formulae, collect the necessary components and hotfoot it to your nearest Enchanter NPC to have your pretty mega weapon crafted. Scrolls have also been thrown into the mix, and may be loaded in the hotbar for one-time spells and buffs. And all this awesome new stuff can be neatly packed with the new auto-sort button, and horded in the new town stash. It's all new, it's all improved. But wait, there's more.

An entirely new Dream Mastery skill tab has been added, offering an additional nine combination character classes.

Suitable for both melee and spell casting character types, the Dream Mastery skills grant players the ability to warp reality itself, bending space and time to their advantage. Dream characters called 'seers' will master three trances: the empathetic trance, which reflects a portion of damage dealt back to its inflictor; the convalescent trances, which bestow rapid healing and damage absorption; and the trance of wrath, which enfeebles and damages enemies with psionic energy. Seers are also able to put enemies to sleep, dispel protective magic, and slither in and out of the waking world. Quite possibly the niftiest thing the seer has in its phantasmagoric arsenal is its class pet, the nightmare – a hideous creature that shoots beams of psionic energy from its fathomless eyeball, and has a hypnotic gaze.

While three new Mediterranean areas have been laid in your warpath, your intrepid assault against these mythological villains is ultimately going to take you past the flailing jaws of hell's ill-tempered guardian cur, Cerberus, over the fabled River Styx and down into the gloomy depths of Hades and the final showdown on the Elysium Fields. Guiding and aiding you in this bold and nightmarish undertaking are the blind seer Tiresias, the legendary heroes Agamemnon and Achilles, as well as the death-defying Odysseus. Wearing a skirt has never been so cool. **NAG**







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## VITAL INFO

## Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

## Developer

FromSoftware

## Publisher

Sega

## Distributor

TBA

## Genre

Action

## Release Date

Q3 2007

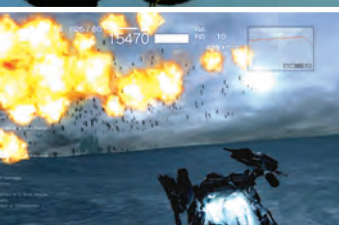
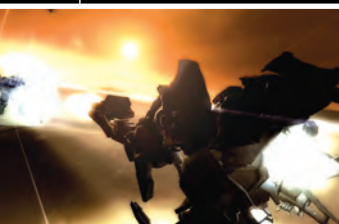


## ARMORED CORE 4

**A**NOTHER ARMORED CORE GAME! Wow, it has managed to make the transition throughout all of Sony's consoles from the PS1 to the PS2, PSP and now the PS3. Not only has it accomplished this, but it will also try its hand at the Xbox 360, poking at Sony's inability to keep exclusivity in some of its main titles. AC4 looks to be absolutely awe-inspiring in terms of graphics. This time around, it will return to its original storyline in an attempt to retell the tale from a different angle. In other words, if you are new to the series then this is the perfect chance to enter its world. The screenshots and trailers demonstrate that almost everything will be destructible. The developers having worked overtime to develop an advanced physics engine to compliment big mech destruction, so fans can expect to sit back and enjoy the absolute mayhem and destruction.

For those of you who enjoy customisation, this is the game for you. It features the ability to refit just about anything - from choosing what weapons and limbs you want to use on your mech to the very systems that are installed on it. You will also be able to swap blueprints with your friends over the Net, using the Xbox Live system or the PS3's PlayStation Network. There will, of course, be a multiplayer option for both online and offline play, with up to seven players being able to compete against each other online. Unfortunately, when offline, there will only be a two-player split screen available with no form of co-op. That should hopefully be all good and fine, since the developers claim AC4's new artificial intelligence system should challenge even the most dedicated of players depending on their settings.

Massive arenas will be open for players to explore. These have been made in great detail, which is also reflected when you occasionally travel indoors to reach a destination. This title should be a huge success, especially since it will be launching on both the PS3 and Xbox 360. So far, the only mech game we have seen on next-gen consoles has been *Chromehounds*, so the genre could do with some company. **NAG**





# BULLET WITCH

**2013 AD.**

Humanity hangs on the verge of extinction.

An army of evil, twisted monsters walk the Earth.

Just as the few survivors are accepting the end of civilization,  
a beautiful woman appears before them, dressed in black, with the  
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## VITAL INFO

### Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

### Developer

CD Projekt Red

### Publisher

Atari

### Distributor

TBA

### Genre

RPG

### Release Date

Q2 2007

# THE WITCHER

**D**ID YOU KNOW THAT Andrzej Sapkowski is Poland's best-selling fantasy author? We didn't, and we're shocked that nobody bothered to tell us. *The Witcher* is an upcoming action-RPG based on the books of the same name, and is being built on BioWare's Aurora Engine - the one that powered *Neverwinter Nights*. CD Projekt was actually the Polish publisher for *Neverwinter Nights* in Poland, responsible for the localisation of the title for the Polish market.

The game, like the books, follows young protagonist Geralt, a trained warrior sword-specialist who has been subjected to mutations and other nasty things so as to produce some kind of super-fighter, a Witcher. Witchers, it seems, only bother with magical creatures, the undead, werewolves and such. Geralt travels the Nording Realms, which are (unsurprisingly) threatened by some unspeakable doom. Some elven prophecy predicts that the world will be destroyed, and, of course, it's your job to prevent this from happening.

CD Projekt Red is focusing on creating a multiple-path RPG, where the player's actions and choices influence eventual outcomes. The game itself is a linear story, but how the player approaches each situation can drastically change things. Travelling roads by day sees washerwomen going to the river to do laundry and other innocents

doing their tasks, but at night it becomes a dangerous passage wrought with bandits and other nasty things.

Combat is a fast, frantic affair that combines the clicking of *Diablo* with the combo-chaining ideas brought forth in the little-known RPG *Revenant*. There are three different attack styles: fast, strong and group. The first takes out weaker or fast enemies but isn't very strong. The second works on larger creatures but will miss the fast ones. The group style delivers blows to multiple enemies. You string together strokes with optimal timing to create combination attacks that are learned as part of the character development system. You can even fight bare-handed, which is a non-lethal affair, and it might just be the best approach if suddenly confronted with a bar fight.

*The Witcher* runs on a greatly improved engine compared to the one used for *Neverwinter Nights*, despite their common backgrounds. Gone are the tiles that made up the *Neverwinter* world, replaced instead by a much more freeform system, which actually allows the developers to paint the textures onto the game world in their editor. The most striking feature of *The Witcher* is its animations - fluid visceral affairs that involve dismemberment and a general disregard for the cohesion of creatures.

There is no indication of a cooperative multiplayer mode just yet, though it is doubtful there will be any form of multiplayer. **NAG**





# TOP!

## SELLING PS2 GAMES



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## VITAL INFO

## ■ Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

## ■ Developer

Codemasters

## ■ Publisher

Codemasters

## ■ Distributor

TBA

## ■ Genre

Action/RPG

## ■ Release Date

TBA

## OVERLORD

**R**EMEMBER THE LAST TIME you were playing [insert name of RPG here], and the aged halfling farmer you'd just rescued from the nefarious clutches of the local dark troll wizard enclave handed over three gold pieces and some bits of twig in reward for your selfless and extraordinary act of bravery? Did you feel like separating that simpering, woolly head from its shoulders, and cleaving that ungrateful carcass in twain? Well, now you can!

Picking up the shattered dreams where *Fable* left them, *Overlord* puts players in the role of a twisted, selfish and pathologically egotistical villain who, once laid to (un)rest by the noble efforts of a gaggle of foolhardy knights errant, has now been re-awakened by his minions and is hell-bent on (what else?) total world domination.

At the start of the game, your evil empire consists of no more than a crumbling old castle and a handful of fawning bug-eyed imps. Since this clearly won't do, you're going wade out into the countryside, and lay pitiless waste to everything that looks nice, unconquered, and momentarily startled.

Your goblinoid minions come in four flavours, each with their own tactical advantages. Brown minions are your bog-standard grunts. They're impetuous, brawny, and good at breaking stuff. They'll also pick up and use anything they find, and are remarkably resourceful – you'll see them scrambling about wearing saucepans as helmets and wielding kitchen forks as weapons of isolated and

diminished destruction. Green minions are limber, ninja-like assassins, best suited for sneaky stabs-in-the-back, while red minions are fireball hurlers-extraordinaire. Blue minions are pipsqueakish support troops – useless in combat, but a dapper hand at resurrecting fallen comrades.

You increase your pool of minions by slaying basically anything with eyeballs, grabbing their souls, and throwing them into a sort of minion construction factory inside a makeshift volcano. Keep these critters alive long enough, furthermore, and they'll level up along with you. But beware! These multicoloured agents of your despotic vision are stupid and easily distracted. If a minstrel flounces into town mid-pillage, for example, your pea-brained goons will stop smashing and start dancing, while the indignant denizens launch a pitchfork reprisal.

Once you've subdued the natives, it's all about keeping them subdued. To ensure their continued trembling and preclude any foolish insurrectionist blather in the cellar of the local tavern, you'd be well advised to place gentle reminders of your dominance around the village, as well as the occasional – and really, most reasonable – demand for a virgin sacrifice.

The game sports some pretty dazzling graphics, with bloom, particle, and HDR lighting effects in shameless abundance. With five realms to ravage and corrupt to your delight, there's a whole lot of evil cake to be had and eaten. **NAG**







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## VITAL INFO

### Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

### Developer

Ascaron

### Publisher

Ascaron

### Distributor

Megarom [011] 234-2680

### Genre

RPG

### Release Date

March 2008

# SACRED 2: FALLEN ANGEL

**S**ACRED 2: FALLEN ANGEL is set 2,000 years before the original *Sacred* in the visually stunning medieval-like kingdom of Ancaria. The realm of the High Elves has collapsed, due to a civil war over use of the T Energy, the source of all life, magic, and thought, and with it the entire power structure. Chaos swept through Ancaria and the T Energy went out of control. The T Energy, once a source of creative power, was now changed into something negative, causing creature and animal mutations and leaving whole areas destroyed or uninhabitable. Once more Ancaria is faced with a war over the control of the T Energy. The future of this land lies in your character's hands and it is up to you whether you will choose the alliance of good or evil.

According to *Sacred 2*'s Creative Director, Hans Arno Wegner, gamers can expect a "tighter single-player experience than before" with two campaigns to choose from, but assures that it "will have great multiplayer features with all the favourite playing modes you will expect." Hans also reassures fans of the original title that the same humour and storytelling that fans loved have been carried through into the sequel, as well as their striking character designs.

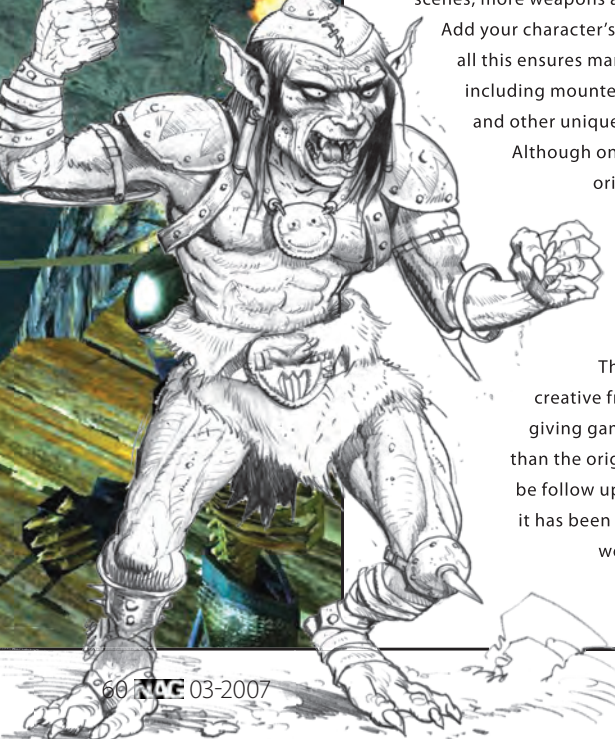
With high quality graphics, beautiful animation and an obvious attention to detail, the 3D world of *Sacred 2*, with no reloading required, will no doubt absorb gamers completely into this fantasy world. Ascaron has also built in some special graphic features, including the unique Gore Feedback, which will display the strength and power of your own character, as well as an innovative emotional system that will give an air of authenticity to all the characters in the game.

In addition, by refining and improving the mechanics that worked so well in the original game, what was loved about *Sacred* has not been lost. The official Website for the new game also claims "more action, more monsters, more scenes, more weapons and combos and feedback."

Add your character's ability to perform spells and all this ensures many awe-inspiring battle scenes, including mounted battles with new warhorses and other unique riding mounts.

Although only the Seraphim class from the original game will be included in this sequel, Ascaron promises five completely new characters to choose from, each with their own distinct personalities and abilities.

This sequel will allow much more creative freedom with the characters, giving gamers more customising options than the original game did. There will also be follow up support for the game, once it has been released, in the form of new weapons, enemies, and quests to add to your game. **NAG**





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PlayStation 2

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## VITAL INFO

### Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	GBA

### Developer

Climax

### Publisher

2K Games

### Distributor

TBA

### Genre

Action

### Release Date

February 2007



# GHOST RIDER

**W**OULD YOU TRADE YOUR soul to save the life of someone you loved? Apparently superstar motorcycle stunt rider and *Ghost Rider*'s human alter-ego, Johnny Blaze, a Marvel comic antihero, would. Johnny trades his soul with Mephistopheles to save his terminally ill father and so is doomed forever to nightly share his body with the demonic entity that is Ghost Rider. However, Mephisto is not done with Blaze yet. Some demons have escaped from Hell and are threatening to start the Apocalypse. Mephisto offers Blaze a final choice: either he must use his powers as Ghost Rider to help eliminate the demons, or watch as Mephisto takes Roxanne Simpson, Johnny's love, as his own.

Now you can get the chance to play as Ghost Rider as he takes on the demons that have run rampant on earth. Luckily, being a demonic entity, Ghost Rider does have some superpowers, like superhuman strength, speed and durability, and a few unearthly weapons and a Hell Cycle at his disposal.

When taking on a pack of demons, Ghost Rider has a variety of light and heavy attacks which can be strung together to create some powerful and damaging combination attacks. The more combination moves Ghost Rider performs successfully, the more the Spirit Gauge fills up, which allows you to use the Hellfire Shotgun and Hellfire Chain in combat. The Spirit Gauge, when filled, gives you the option of activating the Retribution Mode. While this mode lasts, Ghost Rider will not only have heightened speed and damage, but will also be able to use the Penance Stare on his enemies. Using the Penance Stare will force enemies to experience a level of emotional pain equivalent to that which they have caused others.

The Vengeance Bar is another interesting feature of the *Ghost Rider* game. The more combination attacks the Ghost Rider makes, the higher the bar is raised and so increases the number of souls that he can receive when enemies are defeated. Some enemies, however, cannot be defeated until the bar has been raised sufficiently, forcing you to constantly change attacks.

The souls of defeated enemies, ripped from their bodies, can be stored and used as currency later. Upgrades and improvements for the Hell Cycle, Hellfire Chain and Hellfire Shotgun can be bought with this currency, as well as new moves and stat increases. This currency can even be used to get a glimpse of the concept art and bonus characters.

Thankfully, the storyline is not the typical movie-to-game association that we've seen in the past. The storyline for the *Ghost Rider* game, which picks up where the movie leaves off, was especially written by comic writer legends Garth Ennis and Jimmy Palmiotti and so is unlikely to disappoint. **NAG**





## VITAL INFO

### Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

### Developer

FASA Studios

### Publisher

Microsoft

### Distributor

TBA

### Genre

Multiplayer FPS

### Release Date

TBA



# SHADOWRUN

THE YEAR IS 2021 and magic has resurfaced, after a 5,000-year absence, in the modern world.

There are two factions struggling over the use of this magic: the mega corporation RNA, which wishes to control the use of magic to ultimately profit from it; and the Lineage faction, battling to keep magic a free entity.

Set in and around the city of Santos, Brazil, the landscape is a mixture of corporate high-rise buildings, slums, and unexplored ruins. Teams can be a mixture of characters, from humans to trolls or elves, each with their own distinctive abilities. Magic spells and an impressive range of weapons, which blend together modern technology and ancient magic, make for some impressive team combat.

Microsoft and FASA Studios have teamed up to create not only a graphically impressive title that fuses multiplayer FPS and RPG together seamlessly, but also the first ever cross platform online gaming opportunity for Xbox 360 and Window Vista players. Now gamers can compete, not only to prove their skills superior, but also their platform too. The multiplayer option allows teams of up to 16 players (which can be a combination of AI players as well as real life teammates) to play against each other using the System Link, Split Screen, LAN and Xbox Live systems. *Shadowrun* also has a host of online mini-games to play and gamers can play offline with AI teammates and foes in a variety of game types including Raids. **NAG**



## VITAL INFO

### Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

### Developer

Firaxis

### Publisher

2K Games

### Distributor

TBA

### Genre

RPG

### Release Date

March 2007



# SID MEIER'S PIRATES!

SINCE IT WAS FIRST released in 1987, *Sid Meier's Pirates!* has come a long way; being re-released onto the PC in late 2004 and the Xbox mid-2005. Now it's making its way onto the PSP.

The game concept has remained much the same over the years, merely being redefined with each new release, and so PSP gamers will find themselves, once again, placed in the position of a Pirate Captain in 17<sup>th</sup> century Caribbean waters. Your goal is still to become the most revered pirate in the land and so you must amass a large fortune of stolen bounty and thereby become infamous.

There have, however, been some interesting additions and variations for the PSP. Treasure hunting, a feature in the PC title, which was not included in the Xbox version, means that your crew will no longer automatically pick up treasure when you find land. A totally new feature in the *Pirates!* collection are traps that can surprise you on your loot finding missions, such as booby traps and patrolling wildcats, which will happily relieve you of a crew member or two. The dance sequence has been made simpler, but no less effective, by the addition of a symbols bar at the bottom of the screen that indicates what moves will be needed next.

The ad hoc multiplayer feature, allowing for up to four players, as well as a host of new treasure hunts, beautiful widescreen graphics, and a 3D environment insure hours of play on this classic title. **NAG**





## VITAL INFO

### Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

### Developer

Sega Driving Studio

### Publisher

Sega

### Distributor

TBA

### Genre

Racing

### Release Date

2007

### Multiplayer

TBA

# SEGA RALLY EVO

**S**EGA RALLY, FOR SOME reason or another, has been slow to re-emerge after the first two games in the late nineties. There were a few miserable portable versions, but a third game only arrived in early 2006. Developed by a different Sega team, it was only released in Japan and South Korea, and apparently wasn't that impressive. Meanwhile, Sega created the Sega Driving Studio, a British outfit that would focus on Sega's automotive efforts (except *Full Auto*, we suppose). The first game this team has decided to tackle is the much loved arcade racer series, but fans might be unhappy to hear that none of the series' legacy will necessarily make it into the new incarnation. However, the focus on speed and driving remains. The next-generation overhaul also brings terrain deformation similar to *Motorstorm*'s: these tyre grooves in the dirt will affect the game and create patches for better boosting, especially as a racing line develops. Car configurations are also being kept simple: simply choose one most suited to the type of road you'll be racing on. Not surprisingly, it looks incredible and the game certainly looks much prettier than when it was when first shown at E3 last year. However, the game is *Sega Rally* in name only with not even classic tracks returning. Then again, it has only been three games and one of them was a bomb, so there's not that much at stake - and a great new arcade racer would be a nice addition to game collections. **NAG**



## VITAL INFO

### Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

### Developer

Ubisoft Romania

### Publisher

Ubisoft

### Distributor

Megarom

### Genre

Simulation

### Release Date

March 2007

### Multiplayer

1-4

# SILENT HUNTER 4

**W**HILE THE IDEA OF a submarine simulator might seem very tedious, the *Silent Hunter* series has gone quite far to make the idea of doing tasks on a submarine more interesting, while still keeping the enthusiasts onboard as well, so to speak. Like many niche simulators (the *GTR* series comes to mind), in *Silent Hunter* the simulation level can be changed, from as technical as managing every aspect of the ship to simply pointing at the target and ordering a torpedo to be sent towards it. *Silent Hunter 3* established many ideas for the series that made it work well and the game quickly endeared it to simulation fans. However, casual fans were a bit harder to persuade and *SH3*'s problems (which

were subsequently patched) pushed it away from any mainstream appeal. With the fourth game, the same team is back at work with an improved engine and a vision to make the game more appealing to everyone. The ocean is open for travel, but since it's World War II, a commander should probably follow his orders. The new game will introduce a dynamic objective system, keeping captains busy during seemingly routine operations. There will be four American sub classes to pilot and over 50 classes of ships in the game, while multiplayer will let one player control surface forces wary of sub attacks from other players. So far, it looks like *Silent Hunter 4* will be the crown of the series. **NAG**





## VITAL INFO

## ■ Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

## ■ Developer

Cyanide Studios

## ■ Publisher

hell-tech (sic)

## ■ Distributor

TBA

## ■ Genre

Action/RPG

## ■ Release Date

Q2 2007



## LOKI

**A**RE YOU ONE of the thousands of people waiting for the next instalment of *Diablo*? Unfortunately for you Blizzard has yet to release any news of any more sequels. On a brighter note, though, is the upcoming hack and slash by Cyanide Studios called *Loki*. This title will feature some truly brilliant concepts in terms of customisation as well as a lot of eye candy. *Loki* will be set in a mythological world where the Egyptian god of evil and darkness, Seth, starts wreaking havoc. Players will be able to choose between four different classes known as the Aztec Shaman, Norse fighter, Egyptian magician or a Greek warrior.

Where the graphics are concerned, *Loki* looks to be a truly beautiful world and will be set in the 'over the shoulder' perspective, but could be adjustable to an overhead view as well. From what can be seen from the screenshots, the amount of detail that has been put into various objects is quite astounding.

The customisation that was mentioned earlier has a lot to do with the weapon structure of the game. Weapons will be broken down into components that can be mixed and matched to suit anyone, and players will also be able to imbue these with spells and enchantments of their choosing.



Move over *Titan Quest*, your mythological rival has reared its head and will be launching itself sometime in the near future - and this time the mythological forces will have some superb graphics to back them up. **NAG**

## VITAL INFO

## ■ Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

## ■ Developer

Pendulo Studios

## ■ Publisher

Ascaron

## ■ Distributor

Megaron [011] 234-2680

## ■ Genre

Adventure

## ■ Release Date

TBA

## RUNAWAY 2

**I**N *RUNAWAY: A ROAD Adventure*, a traditional point-and-click adventure, Brian Basco (physics major and early pioneer of nerdcore) saved Gina Timmons (nightclub, er, entertainer, and requisite damsel in distress) from the mob, and scored a vindicating victory for bespectacled underdogs the world over. Trouble, however, seems to pursue this unlikely pair with relentless determination, and in *Runaway 2: Dream of the Turtle*, a mid-air ejection from a tumbling airplane over a Pacific island jungle is really just the start of a series of spots of bother.

The sequel features the same natty, cell-shaded 2D graphics of its predecessor, with immensely detailed pre-rendered pseudo-3D backgrounds openly concealing all those ever-elusive hotspots. You'll have to pixel-hunt around, and direct the ever-obliging Brian to examine, collect, and attempt to jam together all manner of weird stuff in order to progress. This will include figuring out how a chainsaw, a bottle of bear pheromones, and an empty gas canister will enable Brian to catch wild salmon, so time to get your brainstem on - this is old school adventuring at its finest and most illogically perplexing.

There are over a hundred locations, from Hawaiian islands to Alaskan snowscapes through secret military bunkers and sunken pirate ships, to explore, spanning six lengthy chapters. On the way, players will encounter a professor who has lost his short-term memory after guzzling toxic berries, uncover a government conspiracy involving aliens, learn an intriguing theory about polar bears, and brave the spider minions of the evil Lady Tarantula. **NAG**





## VITAL INFO

### Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	<b>PSP</b>
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

### Developer

Zipper Interactive

### Publisher

SCEE

### Distributor

SK Games [011] 445-7900

### Genre

Tactical

### Release Date

March 07



## VITAL INFO

### Platforms

PC	PS2	<b>PS3</b>	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

### Developer

EA

### Publisher

EA

### Distributor

EA South Africa [011] 516-8300

### Genre

Sport

### Release Date

2007



# SOCOM: FIRETEAM BRAVO 2

THE FIRST *SOCOM* GAME for the PSP caused a bit of a stir, pioneering headset and voice support, and delivering an unparalleled tactical shooting experience, as well as some excellent online play – two rather elusive features for Sony's handheld. Coinciding with the release of *SOCOM: Combined Assault* for PS2, *SOCOM: Fireteam Bravo 2* has all the cool, innovative features of its predecessor, as well as an all-new single-player campaign, gameplay upgrades, and three new frag-filled multiplayer modes.

Once again running about in the hobnailed flippers of two elite US Navy SEALs, your task is to liberate the (fictional) country of Adjikistan from the clutches of an insidious gang of paramilitary rapscallions. This noble endeavour spans over 14 missions, including hostage rescue, the capturing of enemy officers, gathering intelligence, and blowing stuff up. Bundled into these, there are also numerous optional secondary objectives that players can complete to earn Command Equity points – rack up enough of these, and you'll have access to new weapons, emergency supply drops, and air strikes. In addition to this, you can also earn yourself a reputation with the locals by dashing in and saving those squealing, inexplicably useless civilians stranded hither and yon on the battlefields. Improve your Local Influence enough and they'll graciously show you their black market wares, or tell you where the bad guys are hiding.

With over six hours of single-player action, immense replayability, and fantastic multiplayer options, *Fireteam Bravo* looks to be a fantastic all-round shooter for gamers on the move. **NAG**



# SKATE

FINALLY, A SKATEBOARDING SIMULATION that is actually realistic! At first glance, this new title being released by Electronic Arts seems too good to be true. The developers have stated that *Skate* will have its own intuitive control system in which each analogue stick will control a different leg. Pull the stick backwards to perform an Ollie, while pushing them forward performs a kick flip. This new control system has been labelled Flickit and if it lives up to its hype, we are all in for a treat. Unfortunately, EA has not yet commented on whether or not *Skate* will use the PS3's SIXAXIS system, but only time will tell. There is, of course, a whole cast of legendary skaters including Danny Way, who actually jumped the Great Wall of China last year, and PJ Ladd.

All the animations will be unique to different situations as they are all based on the physics of the game, meaning no two falls will be the same. Graphically this game looks to be a work of art. This is going to be one heck of an experience that will have even the most fanatical Tony Hawk fans abandoning the Hawkster for *Skate*.

*Skate* will revolutionise the skating simulations that we currently have. And who knows; maybe Activision might even try something completely different with the next *Tony Hawk* title. The game has been slated for release on both Xbox 360 and PS3, but alas, there is no mention of *Skate* coming to the Wii. **NAG**







## VITAL INFO

### Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

### Developer

GFI Russia

### Publisher

GFI

### Distributor

TBA

### Genre

Action

### Release Date

Q2 2007

# GLUCK'OZA: ACTION

**H**MM, WHAT CAN be said about this game? For starters, it is about a girl named Gluck'Oza and her friends who have to defeat the evil incubator who keeps spewing monstrous little pigs and vampires out at them. This will be a rather unique game concentrating on, based on what can be seen from the trailers and screenshots, humour and pure absurdity. So while you, the player, will be kicking Porky's ass, a good laugh will be heard every now and then. The pigs are all dressed in some weird Nazi-like uniforms. The vampires haven't been revealed yet - they might even be the little porkers themselves in some circumstances.

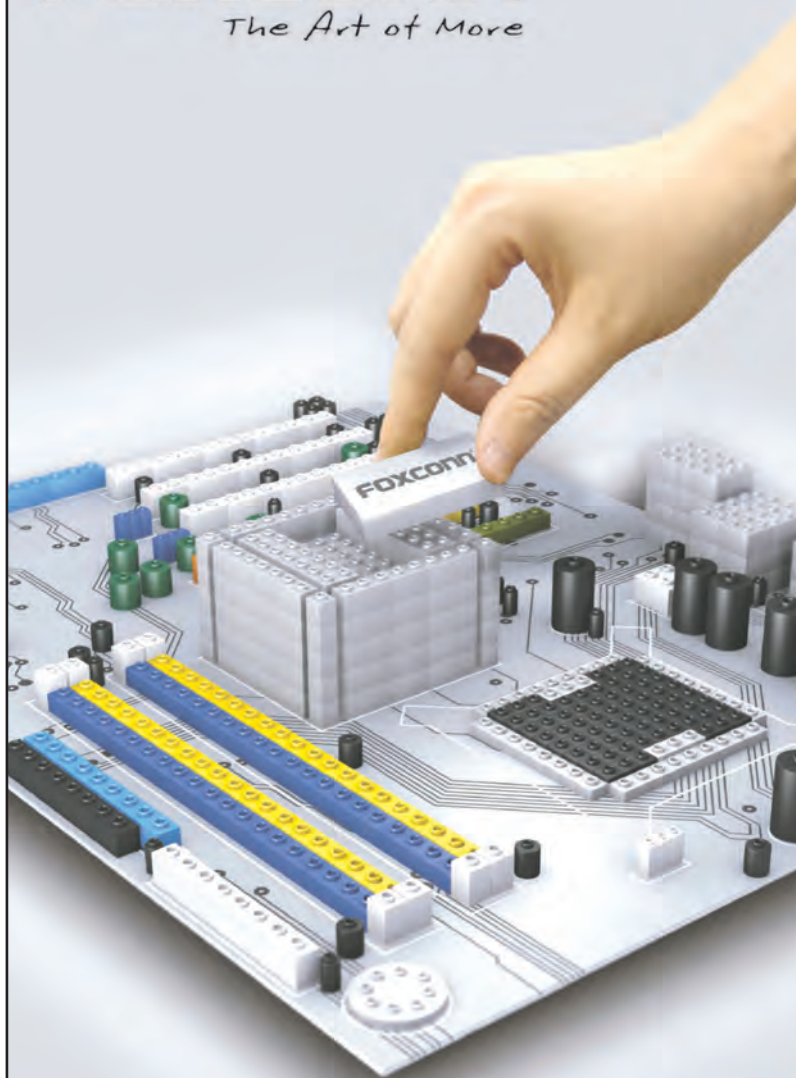
In terms of gameplay, *Gluck'Oza: Action* looks to be pretty good and it will combine both the fighting and third-person action genres together. You will get to pick up many weapons during missions, which can all be used to completely devastate your enemies. It will be cool to see how the developers will handle the moves in the game. Will they be corny or stylish? It is a wait and see type of game.

Graphically this game looks pretty good, but nothing spectacular is to be seen so far. Let us all just hope that the sound will be done well and that the soundtrack will fit the mood that the game will create. **NAG**



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# BIOSHOCK Q&A



KEN LEVINE

**Players will be able to hack into security systems or craft their own weapons, but how will that be represented; as a mini-game, or more simply?**

Players will be able to hack security systems and other items through a mini-game that is modifiable based on their character skills and abilities. In addition, the player can modify weapons and craft many different items including unique ammo types.

**The Ecological AI is obviously a selling premise of *BioShock*. Could you elaborate and demonstrate its strong points?**

In order to buff your character, you need the resource the Little Sisters are carrying. Problem is they're protected by the Big Daddies, the biggest, 'baddest' AIs you'll come across in *BioShock*. Unlike a boss monster, this duo freely wanders the halls of Rapture and isn't confined to a 'boss battle' room. To take out the Big Daddy, you have to set up the ambush. You get to hack security bots to help you; you get to turn AIs against one another; you get to use pools of water, oil slicks and dynamic objects to your advantage. In the video we'll be releasing soon, you'll see the player pick up teddy bears, light them on fire, toss them at the Big Daddy, light him on fire, watch him catch other AIs and even set world objects on fire. You'll see the player hack into security bots and send them against the Big Daddy. You'll even see the player use telekinesis to snatch grenades out of the air and toss them at his enemies. It's all somewhat awesome.

**As *BioShock* has developed, what has been your favourite stand-out moment? Perhaps something that has occurred due to the revolutionary AI?**

Absolutely the relationship moments between the Big Daddy and Little Sister. Watching the moment where he first lifted her up by the scruff of her neck to put her behind him so he could protect her and then manoeuvre himself so the player could never get between the two of them. That was pretty cool. You never see characters in FPSs having relationships that don't revolve around violence, and that is why these two characters really stand out.

**On replayability... how many different ways can you take to finish the game successfully?**

I can't even put a number to that. One of the great joys of working on this game is watching the different play styles evolve in the QA pit and among the team.

**What gameplay styles will the game facilitate? Will it be possible to finish the game avoiding fights and using only non-combat skills, or to reach the final credits only using brute force?**

**O**NE PLANE CRASH INTO the ocean later, a quick trip in a bathysphere to the ocean floor, and you're suddenly stranded inside Rapture - a crumbling city but a ghost of its former Utopian self. From this point forward, your choices have impact, your actions beget repercussions. Do you shoot the little girl who just ran past, or do you follow her to try to discover more? What happened to Rapture, to put it in such a state of disrepair? What happened to the people who once lived here? *BioShock* is all about these questions, and the answers you'll discover for yourself.

We ask a few questions to *BioShock*'s rather ambitious creative director, Kevin Levine, about the upcoming 'spiritual successor' to the cult-classic *System Shock*.

This is an FPS, but it adds all kinds of abilities for the player to influence the world and the AIs around them, from hacking to electricity travelling through water to fire spreading to turning AIs against each other to taking over security systems. But yes, you can shoot a hell of a lot of things as well.

**In his quest in *BioShock* the player will face situations that will put his personal ethics to test. Could you describe what kind of situations the player will encounter and what the decisions will be that he will have to take?**

We've discussed mostly how the Big Daddies and Little Sisters play into the ethical choices in the game. We fully support where you befriend them, or become their worst enemies. Like everything in *BioShock*, these choices are not handled through dialogue trees or interface elements. The decisions are made by the direct actions the player takes in the game. Wait until you see what it means to help a Little Sister... being a nice guy isn't always hearts and flowers. It's dark, and intense, but our goal is to really make you feel like you've done something for these exploited children.

**There seems to be a strong message in *BioShock* - you have said the game is picturing a scenario where capitalism has gone too far. Also, plenty of inspiration seems to be taken from books. How important is the next-gen hardware in order for you to achieve this?**

For Irrational, graphics are a means to an end. The days where people "Ooohed!" and "Ahhhed!" over frame buffer effects are over. It's like what happened with special effects in the movies. You can have the best visuals in the world, but if it doesn't support what you're trying to do from a gameplay and story perspective, you're wasting your time. "Utopia gone wrong" - this message is conveyed in every single screenshot. It was critical for us to make Rapture beautiful, so the ugliness of the war that tore it apart would present a stark contrast.

**The art deco design that you are using in *BioShock* is strikingly beautiful. Where did you get the idea to use it?**

I wish I could say Irrational was more organised and more businesslike and pretend we had it all from day one. But we didn't. We went through an extensive high-level design period on *BioShock* and tossed out a bunch of design ideas and aesthetic approaches. I spent a lot of time in New York as a kid. I've actually worked in the Empire State Building. It's hard not to be influenced by that architecture. *BioShock*'s pretty innovative. You'd have to be a lot smarter than us to come up with it all at once. We actually created what we came to regard as a failed prototype in mid-2005 that showed














us much of what we didn't want to do with this game. Fortunately, our publisher 2K had enough vision to say, "Cool. You screwed it up. Try again."

**When did you start to make *BioShock*? What was the original vision of the game and how has it changed since then?**

We really started initial work on *BioShock* way back in 2003. The vision of the game hasn't changed that much from a gameplay perspective, though we've come up with many cool things along the way. The biggest later additions, I think, were the most important: the Big Daddy, the Little Sisters, the look and the storyline. The goal of trying to rethink and redefine what a first-person shooter could be was always there. I think it took us some time to be able to put that goal into words. Again, the development of *BioShock* was – and continues to be – a very organic process.

**You said in an interview that the scariest thing is to be trapped between two ideologies, and that seems to be a theme of *BioShock*. Has the current political situation in the world been a source of inspiration for you?**

How can you not feel that way? There seems to be a struggle between elements that both subscribe strongly to some degree of religious fundamentalism. But conflicts are generally fought between fundamentalists and idealists. When you can't adapt your world-view to a changing reality, when your ideology becomes more important than the people you love, you have a recipe for disaster. I'm a sceptic. I'm terrified of people who accept anything at face value. I have friends to the right of me and to the left of me, and sometimes I'm afraid of them both. But generally, point to the guy in power, and that's the guy who makes me most nervous. The question I always ask myself about any position I have is: "What would have to happen to convince me that I'm wrong about this?" If I can't come up with that answer, I know I'm just going along with what everyone says.

**It seems like *Irrational* is taking information from books and movies most gamers and most game developers have not heard of. What is your opinion on the state of the games industry right now: is it going in the right direction?**

I love videogames and I don't have many complaints about the games coming out these days. They're quite my taste (though some more turn-based strategy would rock, thank you very much). I don't know if other developers have different influences than we do. I think we tend to combine more stuff than others do. I was just listening today to a Queen/Fifty Cent mash-up. I like that kind of stuff, but in videogames. We like to bring things to games that people haven't seen in a particular genre: like real choice and open-endedness to the first-person shooter.

**With an utopist city under water and its art-deco style architecture and interiors, *BioShock* stands out from the crowd. What inspired you to create this unusual scenario, and did you choose this more for stylistic or for gameplay reasons?**

*Irrational* is full of insanely smart and savvy guys and girls, a freaky mix of art students, aging skate punks, failed screenwriters, D&D refugees and inexplicably attractive programmers. There's a great chemistry here, and I think the team vibes off each other, challenges each other and surprises each other all the time.

**You said that unlike most other games (and movies), *BioShock* will not start with an intro that sets the scene, introduces characters or explains elements of the story and scenario. The player will start the game without an introduction. What was the reason for this decision?**

I hate FMVs. If the game doesn't absolutely demand it, and we can make it work, we'll push heaven and earth not to have them. We loved

doing the recent *BioShock* pre-rendered trailer, but that was meant to be a film experience and not part of a game.

**With a large, highly interactive game world, a very advanced AI and an extensive upgrade system that allows the character as well as the weapon to be modified in almost infinite ways, *BioShock* seems to be a quite complex game. How do you make sure that the game will also appeal to people who are not experienced gamers, and how will you prevent them from being stuck by taking some 'wrong' choices?**

We're spending a ton of resources building a dynamic training system. Without going into too much detail, it's like a digital version of your buddy who has already played the game watching over your shoulder. When you seem to be stuck, or using the wrong type of ammo, or getting spotted constantly by security cameras, the system will pipe up and lend you a hand. It started as a goal to get rid of the "All right marine, now we're gonna teach you how to crouch!" sequence, but ended up evolving into something much more than that. **NAG**



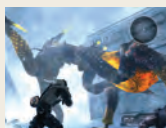


# REVIEWS

## WEB SCORES

### LOST PLANET [360]

NAG [100]	79
Metacritic [100]	79
Gamerankings [100]	80



### UFO AFTERLIGHT [PC]

NAG [100]	74
Metacritic [100]	NA
Gamerankings [100]	81



### SUPERMAN RETURNS [360]

NAG [100]	65
Metacritic [100]	51
Gamerankings [100]	53



### STAR WARS: LETHAL ALLIANCE [PSP]

NAG [100]	76
Metacritic [100]	61
Gamerankings [100]	62



### RAYMAN RAVING RABBITS [PS2]

NAG [100]	85
Metacritic [100]	66
Gamerankings [100]	65



### STAR TREK LEGACY [360]

NAG [100]	51
Metacritic [100]	64
Gamerankings [100]	65



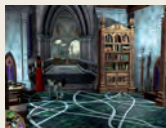
### LOTR: BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH II [360]

NAG [100]	78
Metacritic [100]	79
Gamerankings [100]	80



### KEEPSAKE [PC]

NAG [100]	63
Metacritic [100]	68
Gamerankings [100]	70



The ratings in this section, apart from the NAG ratings, are not the opinion of NAG Magazine. Duh. All scores were correct at time of printing.

74



76



80



92



## WHAT WE'RE PLAYING...



### FINAL FANTASY XII [PS2]

Just couldn't resist importing this one, and now look - over 20 hours wasted running around and letting the game practically play itself. It sure is prudish though, and the cut-scenes are top-notch Square-Enix stuff. Now if only they could have spent a bit more time on the music, which seems to either alternate between soft panpipes or an endlessly looping *Star Wars* copyright infringement waiting to happen.



### RYZOM [PC]

As far as MMORPGs go, *Ryzom* is one of the better ones. It may not be up there on the single-title pantheon that *World of Warcraft* inhabits, but then again, that may not be a bad thing at all. *Ryzom* provides ample freedom, interaction and a rather impressive array of creatures that literally travel in herds or packs. The fee is a bit steep, but some of us are still hooked regardless. Not bad for a three-year-old game.





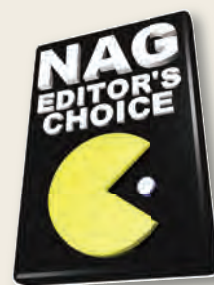
## AWARDS

### EDITOR'S CHOICE

This prestigious award gets bestowed upon games that really catch NAG's collective eye. The Editor's Choice award is for games that have some indefinable trait that just make them stand head and shoulders above the rest, peering about nervously. Usually, games that are fun, visually stunning and which leave a lasting impression are honoured with the coveted Editor's Choice. It's almost similar to knighthood, but not as humiliating!

### CLASSIC AWARD

Any game that scores above 85% gets the much-envied Classic Award in honour of its achievement. Above 85% represents a game that has managed to set itself apart from the crowd of mediocrity – a game worthy of some attention. Games awarded the Classic Award are games you can trust.



## SCORING

NAG is different, NAG is special. We score games on the 50% principle, meaning that we regard 50% as 'average'. It's neither here, nor there. 50% is the perfect middle ground. A game that scores 50% is a game that does nothing wrong, but nothing right either. If a game won't install properly, naturally it scores less than 50%. If a game brings something new to the table, or does what it does well, it'll go up from the 50% average. 60% is above average, a game that might appeal to some. 70% is a game that's pushing its own limits slightly, one that's perhaps putting a new spin on common ideas. 80% represents a game with a difference, one of quality and as few rough edges as possible. 90% is outstanding, a game that has separated itself from the horde to do its own thing, and does it well. No game will ever achieve 100%, because if a game ever did, we'd be out of jobs. Nobody would play anything else anyway.



### MY ANIMAL CENTER IN AFRICA [DS]

This DS game confounds and confuses us. We loaded it and aimed for the Scenario mode, thinking it'd be some cute *Theme Park* clone with a more educational tint. Instead, the horrible visuals defied comprehension and when we finally did reach some kind of meerkat that needed medical attention, we touched it with the stylus and the game crashed. We decided to back away slowly from this one, until we have adults around.



### HEAVY WEAPON [XBLA]

If Real Men play games like *Gradius* (according to a recent Internet trend), then only oompa-loompahs play *Heavy Weapon*. It's a shooter of sorts; you drive your little tank and shoot planes out of the sky. Eventually, nuclear bombs start dropping and the whole thing becomes a full-screen orgy of bullets and laser-beams. The four-player cooperative mode (online even) certainly entertains, except when you play people who insist on using all the nukes in one go.



### CASTLEVANIA: PORTRAIT OF RUIN [DS]

The crisp, clear pixel art from *Dawn of Sorrow* makes a welcome return, and this time you've got a partner helping you out with the whole whipping zombies thing. *Portrait of Ruin* is good, if you like the whole *Castlevania* shtick, and the perfect title to tide us over until *Symphony of the Night* gets released on XBLA. We noticed some kind of online cooperative Boss Rush mode, but we're holding back on that until we stop being so damn terrible at the game.



# RAYMAN RAVING RABBIDS

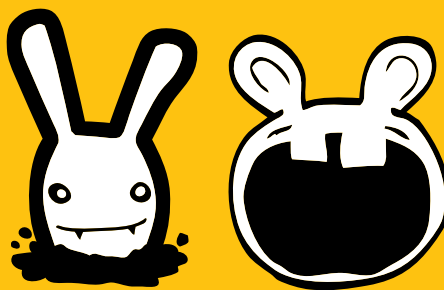
**W**HAT'S THAT THEY SAY about hindsight? Something always seems to dawn on you after the fact – suddenly the solution is obvious. For years, Rayman has been the black sheep or white elephant of the cartoon game character family, whichever you prefer. On the one hand, he has always been shunned by platformer fans in general, never quite establishing the legacy of other icons like Sonic and Mario. On the other, Rayman games never managed to stand out as far as gaming experiences go. However, despite all of this, the limbless character remained close enough to enough people to still be around. He also stayed in the thoughts of his creator, Michel "Beyond Good & Evil" Ancel. "Why doesn't anyone like my creation that much?" he must have thought many evenings while doodling aimlessly. That's perhaps where the Rabbids come from – a careless doodle one. Yes, Rabbids with a 'd', because these critters are a species on their own. They have enough charm and character that it suddenly became clear why Rayman sucked: he had no good nemesis.

Well, no more of that! For reasons quite unapparent, the Rabbids invade Rayman's world and kidnap all of his friends. Then they force him into arena games where, when he completes a set of tasks, he gets a plunger. It doesn't take Rayman long to figure out that enough plungers can form a ladder to the window and his escape. But that's just about where the plot ends. Why the Rabbids imprisoned Rayman isn't all that clear, neither is where they come from, what they are or what's wrong with them. The better Rayman does, the more the Rabbids love him, eventually cheering him on and waving at him while he sits in his holding cell. They even participate in some of the games, often in a masochistic fashion. In one event, quickly alternating the analogues between up and down has Rayman pumping a railway cart down an incline. Hit the barrier at the end of the track with enough force to see how far the Rabbid across from him – Superman costume, slick black hair and all – can be hurtled across the air before hitting the ground. In another Whack-the-Rat style game, Rayman has to repeatedly beat Rabbids on the head with a shovel when they poke their heads out of holes in the ground. Sometimes all it requires is to drown scuba-gear-ed Rabbids with carrot juice before they reach the bar.

But what's so appealing about these Rabbids? Perhaps their insanity. They feature in nearly every game, pulling faces, screaming and twisting their eyes in unnerving directions.







Communication is limited to "Waaaaaaaah!" - always screamed with the passion of someone who just saw a landslide of boulders heading towards them. Sometimes the scream is followed with a plunger shot at the screen. That's the challenge in a game where you have to slap the perpetually-opening doors of portable toilets on the beach. Each contains a Rabbid grunting in relief to salvos of more basic bodily sounds. Leave a door open for just too long and a "Waaaaaaaah!" is followed by the smack of a plunger on your forehead.

Some of the games are tough, others more forgiving, but all very basic. The most demanding in terms of the amount of controls are the boss levels, which usually are on-rail affairs where you shoot the Rabbids before they shoot you. These are always great fun and the later levels are pretty tough. Occasionally a boss level involves falling through a set of rings in the sky. However, the majority of the challenges just need one or two controls. Swing a cow with the analogue and let go with a button. Tap the shoulder buttons to the rhythm of a song. Time jumps over a rope to the tap of a button. It can be more involved, such as finding missing pigs and returning them home before the time runs out. Alternatively, you can try to link as many animals in a pen as possible. Sometimes it just involves shearing the sheep and not the Rabbids who appear to think they are sheep.

You might have noticed that all of this can seem quite nonsensical and it is. In the same way *WarioWare* is inevitably about Wario wanting loot, *Rayman Raving Rabbids* doesn't care about a reason to bring Rayman and the Rabbids together in a collection of excellent mini-games. It's a small pity that the respective games don't load instantly and you'll have to complete the game to get the proper party mode unlocked. It has always been the appeal of the king of this genre, *Mario Party*, to support party play from the start. Nevertheless, even the single-player is fun and rotating the controller around to take turns at a game helps complete it quickly. In multiplayer, up to four players can participate, but you'll need a multi-tap for that.

This is a great and very appealing party game. On top of all that, the Rabbids are just awesome. Hopefully we'll see them in other Rayman games, like a platformer (already the case for the mobile version). **NAG**

## RAYMAN RAVING RABBIDS (PC)

RRP: R185.00

Score: 70/100



It is one of the better-looking versions, but you should invest in a few good analogue controllers for it. The mouse and keyboard controls just don't translate as naturally as they do on the console versions - and that's a problem in a game where reaction means everything.

## VITAL INFO

### Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

### Suggested Retail Price

R299

### Developer

Ubisoft

### Publisher

Ubisoft

### Supplier

Megaron [011] 234-2680

### Genre

Mini-games

### Age Restriction

3+

### Specifications

Players: 1-4 players

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## BOTTOM LINE

Fun mini-games + stupid

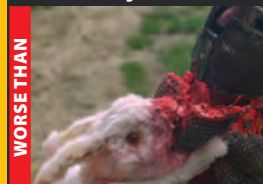
Rabbids = great party game. It's a new life for Rayman!

**85/100**

### WarioWare



### Rabbids ruling the world





# STAR TREK: LEGACY

**CAPTAIN'S BLOG - Star Date 24012007:** Hello, hello... is this on? Hello. Can someone get this thing sorted out? Hello? Ensign Patterson!

**Captain's BLOG - Star Date 25012007 [Supplemental]:** Testing. Hello. Echo one two, one two. Right... that's much better, much better. Note to self to reassign Patterson from latrine duty. This is my first entry as captain. I'm a little apprehensive about tomorrow. There's some bigwig admiral meeting with the union followed by a light lunch and then a meeting with most of the Starfleet captains. Evening cocktails and some cultural entertainment are also on the cards. I wonder what this is all about.

**Captain's BLOG - Star Date 26012007:** Well this sucks. Apparently, the union meeting didn't go off very well and my entire crew complement is on strike - even the bloody android (they want a 12.5% increase and the admiralty is only offering eight). Some of them are hanging around outside the port right now with a few rude banners and signs. We captains don't have that option; it's in our airtight contracts. To cap it off I must leave on a mission tonight. They're retrofitting my ship with some quirky control device and have replaced all the people with software. I have a bad feeling about this and I've only spent about six hours with this new software and control system. There are far too many buttons on it, but luckily, it's configured so that I can have helm, weapons, navigation and tactical command all at the push of a few buttons. I'm not sure what happens if I need the toilet, and I don't trust this autopilot.

**Captain's BLOG - Star Date 28012007:** My mission was to find and protect a Vulcan ship. I found them all right, travelling too close to the neutral zone. It's been two days into this babysitting mission... There's nothing out here, I even took a few pot shots at some stationary asteroids yesterday to ease the boredom. What's the

point of a commission like this if I can't take this ship into the wild black yonder. I haven't quite figured out this control system yet. It seemed easy in the simulator but I can't get the ship travelling in a straight line for any amount of time. It got so bad this morning, the Vulcan captain had to take evasive action. They're not responding to my hails anymore and all the lights on the side of their ship facing me are out. Must be some kind of snubbing signal... Well screw them; they have a full crew complement and all I have is a plastic toy and some faulty software.

**Captain's BLOG - Star Date 29012007:** Today we were attacked by three smaller vessels. I managed to blast them into really tiny pieces, but only by luck and thankfully this ship has decent shields. I spent most of the fight travelling backwards thanks to this damn control system. I swear I could almost hear their laughter. I'm going to have to do something about this problem or next time I might not be so lucky.

**Captain's BLOG - Star Date 01022007:** I've escorted the Vulcan ship back to where it belongs. I still can't do much with this ship and I feel like my superior officer is messing me around. I must take command of three other ships tomorrow and make sure medical supplies are delivered to those pathetic colonists in Sector 3, and get this, they're all going to be linked up to my ship through the almighty controller that doesn't work. I mean, I narrowly missed bending my warp nacelle struts today - the last time I looked I wasn't anywhere near that repair bay.

**Captain's BLOG - Star Date 03022007:** The fleet won't respond to my commands. I can't get them to attack anything or go where I need them without great amounts of effort. My commanding officer gave me a list of verbal commands that I needed to have repeated twice they were so confusing. I've been following





these medical ships around for the last two days. I can see the distant flicker of stars everywhere, but it doesn't look like I'm ever going to visit those far off and exotic worlds. I heard a rumour that my next scheduled mission is delivering toilet seats to yet another stain of colonists! I still can't quite understand what's wrong with the control system on this thing... I'm starting to get that throbbing headache again. I wonder how quick it'll be if I just step into the airlock and suck up a lung or two of nothing.

**Captain's BLOG – Star Date 08022007:** Well, it has been around two weeks now and nothing much has changed. Each time I'm given a new mission I never know what I'm supposed to be doing exactly. I can't fly this damn ship properly. I've actually started doing the opposite of what I want with limited success. Just selecting something simple like scanning a planet is a mammoth task and I'm still trawling around between colonies and bases shooting random enemy ships. This will be my last entry. I just don't have the energy anymore and if this controller gives me one more ounce of hassle...

**Admiral Dalton's BLOG – Star Date 15022007:** We found the Enterprise adrift in space after a week of searching. It's hard to say what exactly happened. The life support system on the bridge had malfunctioned thanks to loss of pressure. One of the viewing ports was shattered and the multifunction autonomous control equipment was found, still attached to its cord, floating outside the ship (one corner of it seemed to have suffered a very hard blow). It appears that the controller was thrown with great force at the viewing port, which lead to depressurisation and life support failure. The unfortunate captain was probably sucked out into space before he knew what was happening. **NAG**

## STAR TREK LEGACY (PC)

To limply flail where most ports have gone before

**N**O, NO AND NO. Dear game developer, you just can't rip the guts out of the console version of a game, change the controls and send it on its way expecting great things. *Star Trek Legacy* is officially our new poster child for everything that is wrong with console to PC ports. It's exactly the same game as the Xbox 360 version, but looks a little 'off' and handles even worse. And to make matters worse, you cannot even change the control system! It's a little difficult trying to describe what's wrong with the graphics exactly, but the word artificial sums it up perfectly. The space graphics and the ship graphics do on't complement each other very well, and you're left with a screen full of average looking and sparsely detailed ships stuck on top of a barren space scene. It's a bit like a science fiction movie with a tragically low budget. The only area they did get right is the voice acting by employing the talents of all five of the original actors: Patrick Stewart, William Shatner, etc. The other issue, control, is just unforgivable. Imagine what you might end up with if you hired someone who doesn't play computer games to quickly squeeze and condense all the button functionality of an Xbox 360 controller down to a mouse and keyboard setup. It's awkward to use, the ship hardly ever does what you want it to do and instead of a graceful space ballet between you and your enemies, you end up with something close to a car crash – you sitting there in the wreckage, facing the wrong direction and wondering what happened. If the Xbox 360 version sounds like something you can work through with a little patience and forgiveness and you can force yourself to like the crippling control system and you're a **BIG** *Star Trek* fan, then *Legacy* might do something special for you. It's really frustrating to think that after all these years and considering how far computer games have come that this is the pinnacle of computer game meets iconic sci-fi culture. The only real hope for the franchise now is that whatever fan power is left in the *Star Trek* brand is blind enough to ignore the poor reviews and go out and buy this game, so that perhaps the next developer will give us the *Star Trek* game we want, exploring space by going wherever we want and killing the things we find when we get there – prime directive be damned. **42/100**

## VITAL INFO

### Platform

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

### Suggested Retail Price

R299.00

### Developer

Mad Doc

### Publisher

Ubisoft

### Supplier

Megaron [011] 234-2680

### Genre

Arcade Action

### Age Restriction

12+

### Specifications

Online: 1 player

Players: 2-4

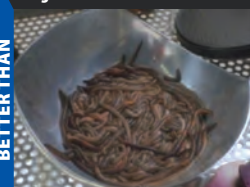
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## BOTTOM LINE

Despite the limited good, the rubbish control system and weak game design pull it all apart in the end. Cry here.

## 51/100

### Klingon food



### Most space simulators





## VITAL INFO

### Platforms

Reviewed on 360

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

### Suggested Retail Price

R375

### Developer

Capcom

### Publisher

Capcom

### Supplier

MIDigital [011] 723-1967

### Genre

Action

### Age Restriction

16+

### Specifications

Multiplayer: Yes

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## BOTTOM LINE

Running, jumping, shooting alien ice insects... it's good fun for a while, but has no real staying power.

**79/100**

### Starship Troopers



### Fun multiplayer



# LOST PLANET: EXTREME CONDITION

**W**E LOVE WAYNE, that snow-logged "all I know is how to fight" guy who's the lead in *Lost Planet*. He's probably the most multidimensional character we've seen in a game yet. Ever. And practically forever.

No, Wayne is actually quite bland, yet perky in comparison to the plot itself. *Lost Planet* really is your typical Capcom fare, which can be roughly summed up as: solid controls, if slightly difficult to master, along with a one-dimensional plot and a few plastic characters who always seem to be on the verge of bursting into tears. We think Wayne actually did go and cry in a corner during one cut scene, but we can't be sure.

As game, *Lost Planet* is fun. You shoot ice insects until they explode into shards, battle huge flying moths on mountains and even partake in the occasional snow-pirate base raid. Along the way, your shooting gets augmented by the odd interspersed VS (mech suit), with satisfying rockets flying everywhere accompanied by a staccato chain gun beat. *Lost Planet's* action and application of said action cannot be faulted; even the checkpoints are liberal and forgiving for those of us who aren't Japanese (warning: stereotype). It's a lengthy game; we doubt you'd be able to finish it in one sitting unless you're used to doing that kind of thing all night, as if you don't have work or school tomorrow. We couldn't, because we're adults now.

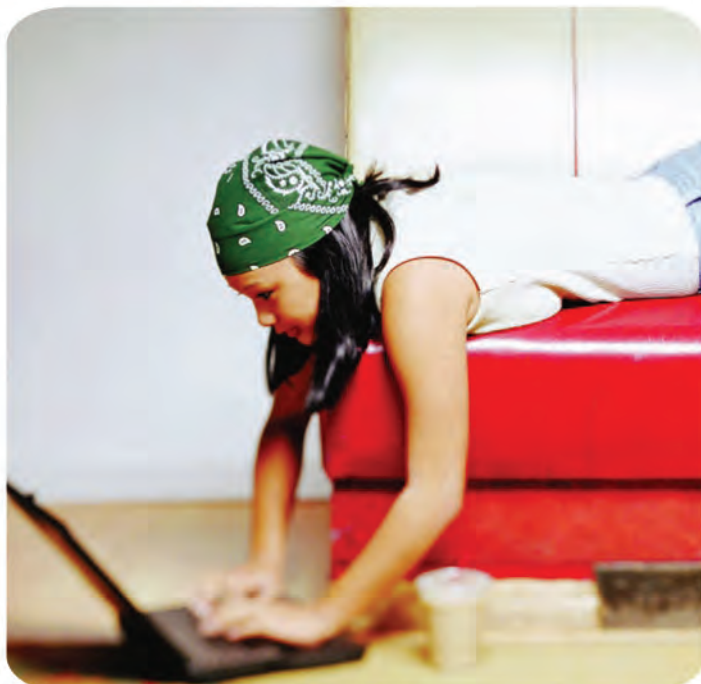
Accompanying the single-player is multiplayer, a few deathmatch and team deathmatch modes, which seem to function quite well, and which have even gathered a respectable local community for itself. There's no way of telling if the locals will just move on (or move back to *Gears of War* or *Rainbow Six: Vegas*) once the fad passes, but we think *Lost Planet* might keep itself a few dedicated local players regardless.

All the snowy action certainly comes across as 'next-gen', whatever that is. Bugs roll convincingly off-course when a grenade 'splodes near them, the snowy snow snows snowistically, and even the later lava seems to loll luxuriously.

But for the most part, it can get old fast. On the easier difficulty levels, the action doesn't lose its shimmer too fast, but pumped up to the heights of Normal or, step back, Hard, you may find yourself unwilling to really bother with the later to last levels. It's just not THAT much fun, and we're sure there are other titles out there with slightly more appeal. **NAG**







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## VITAL INFO

### Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

### Suggested Retail Price

R270

### Developer

ALTAR Games

### Publisher

CENEGA Publishing

### Supplier

Megarom [011] 234-2680

### Genre

Strategy

### Age Restriction

12+

### Specifications

CPU: 2GHz

Video: NVIDIA 6600 GT or ATI Radeon 9800

RAM: 768MB

HDD: 5GB

CD/DVD: DVD-ROM

Multiplayer: No



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## BOTTOM LINE

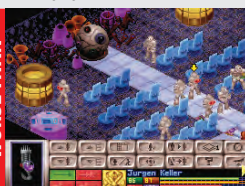
Mysterious. Red. Very Boring. But at least there are aliens to kill.

**74/100**

### UFO: Aftershock (PC)



### X-COM (PC)



# UFO: AFTERLIGHT

**R**IGHT. FIRST ALIENS COME to Earth and throw spores into our atmosphere to try and kill us. We killed that lot. Then, they start bursting out from the core of the planet or something, we're not really sure. Then, after we killed that bunch, a group of aliens rocks up in outer space and evicts us from Earth. We couldn't kill those aliens, for some reason. Now we're a few scientists, engineers and soldiers stuck on Mars, trying to get the place ready to feed a billion or so people.

Just our luck, more aliens appear through warp-gates and generally start causing problems. Humanity, as seen from the viewpoint of the *UFO* series, is a very unlucky group of people. At least this other alien race that suddenly also appeared is friendly. Right? Don't count on it (despite what they might tell you at the Diplomacy screen).

The first *UFO* title, *Aftermath*, was a fairly straightforward strategic combat affair, real time unlike the turn-based *X-COM* titles, which it is based on. Its sequel, *Aftershock*, added in basic base building and some really shallow politics and so on. *Afterlight* takes a few more bold steps forward by expanding on the base building and even throwing in some nice engineering and diplomacy elements. Things are looking up for the *UFO* series, really.

Unfortunately, *Afterlight* inherited some of *Aftershock*'s

problems too. It's buggy as hell, prone to crashing and staggering, just like *Aftershock* even sans a few patches. We hope *Afterlight* has a damn good patch for itself after release, because it both needs it and deserves it. After all, since Atari isn't in the mood to use its shelved *X-COM* license, this 'spiritual successor' *UFO* series is all us fans really have.

Problems aside, *Afterlight* really is slowly taking things back to what made *X-COM* such a much-loved series. It's just taking its sweet time about it. *Afterlight* also focuses much more on the quasi-RPG elements introduced in *Aftershock*: each of your characters has a real personality, albeit slightly cartoony and over the top. It just makes it more endearing, really. We personally grew quite fond of our Superhuman Granny, whom we boosted so high up the skill-tree she could probably have thumb-wrestled Superman and won.

One thing *Afterlight* utterly fails at, however, is variety in terrain. Apparently, Mars is the same three sand dunes, two complexes and one chasm, repeated over and over across its surface. C'mon Atlas, you could have done better than that. **NAG**

[Be sure to check out the 'Aliens in the Cornfield' feature in this month's NAG, for a little more back-story on the *UFO* series and its inspiration, the *X-COM* series.]



This alien totally flipped out and dodged lasers



It was 50 years ago, when cut scenes still looked this bad





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## VITAL INFO

### Platforms

Reviewed on 360

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

### Suggested Retail Price

R375

### Developer

EA Games

### Publisher

Electronic Arts

### Supplier

EA Africa [011] 516-8300

### Genre

Strategy

### Age Restriction

12+

### Specifications

Multiplayer: Yes

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# THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH II

**W**ELL, WELL, AN RTS on a console huh? Don't worry *Battle for Middle-earth II*, you're not actually alone. *Starcraft* had a version for the Nintendo 64, y'know. *Command & Conquer* even appeared on the PlayStation, complete with 3D units. So, in a way, you're not so surprising to us, *Middle-earth II*. But what does shock us is how well you play regardless.

Of course, a controller is not a mouse. As a result, *Middle-earth II* had some thought put into its control scheme, changing it drastically from the PC version to something much more applicable to the 360's controller. The cursor is locked to the centre of the screen instead of floating free, which makes a lot more sense when you actually play it. You can group select by looking at a unit and double-tapping a button, or by holding down the shoulder button while selecting. It's quite easy and fast to select units this way, and the analogue stick does an accelerated or decelerated view-move if you press it sharply in a direction, or softly. A few more shortcut conventions built into the buttons, and you actually have a completely playable *Middle-earth II*, on 360.

It even has proper online support: Live-ranked battles along with many-player skirmishes. The campaign itself is mostly unchanged from the PC version, although visually the 360 version seems to lack a bit of shine compared to its PC brother. We noticed extreme slowdowns initially, which we figured out was due to us saving the game to a memory card - the game must have thought we only had a Core system, and didn't bother using the HDD for caching. Once we saved to the HDD (and patched the game, since one had been released), the framerate issues lessened, but didn't disappear entirely. No split-screen multiplayer sadly, which we think is an oversight on behalf of the developers.

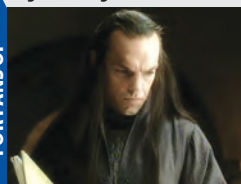
RTS junkies who recently took the leap to console will probably enjoy this one. We think it speaks well of *Middle-earth II* on 360 that there are more players playing it online on Live than on PC. So if you're anxious for the multiplayer action, *Middle-earth II* seems the RTS of choice, until *C&C 3* comes out at least, which is also set to have a 360 version (inspired by the control scheme of *Middle-earth II*, actually). **NAG**

## BOTTOM LINE

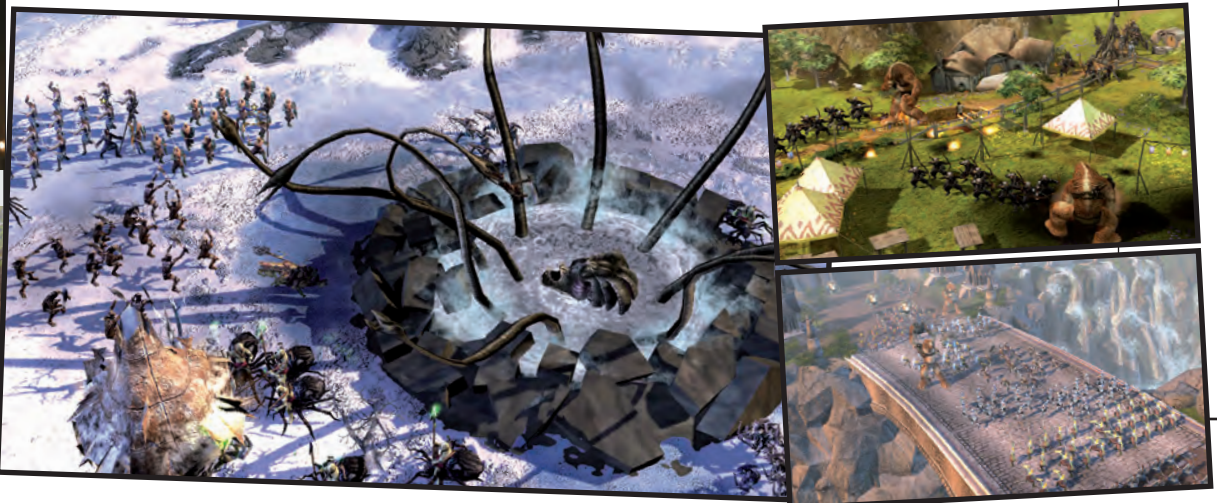
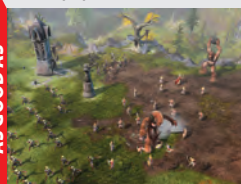
Suffers from some slowdowns, but manages to deliver despite the horror of dual analogues.

**78/100**

Hugo Weaving



BFME II (PC)





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G1 Gaming Package  
(G1 + Backpack + Mouse)

## Sensory Experience

Mere processing power is not enough; being engineered for gaming means the G1 and G2 are sensory maestros. It begins with two sizes of ASUS Color Shine LCD (15.4" G1/ 17" G2 wide aspect) for stunning visuals in fine detail, side and front speakers, as well as game-activated (DirectX 9) Direct Flash sidelights that come on during game play. Together with distinctive, brushed surface of the unique LCD cover to the carbon-fiber effect of the keyboard surround, the gaming series is a mobile entertainment powerhouse given a sci-fi makeover.



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The in-mold decorated cover surface provides sturdy protection to the LCD screen and also prevents the paint from chipping off.



## VITAL INFO

### Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

### Suggested Retail Price

R465

### Developer

EA

### Publisher

EA

### Supplier

EA South Africa [011] 516-8300

### Genre

Action/Superhero

### Age Restriction

12

### Specifications

Multiplayer: No

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## BOTTOM LINE

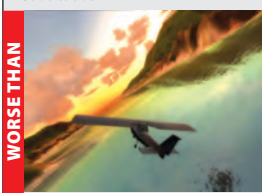
Not terrible, but too boring and unpolished to be good.

65/100

Superman



Just Cause



# SUPERMAN RETURNS

**T**HE MAN OF STEEL is back! Then again, it's a bit hard to believe he had abandoned Earth in search of his home planet when there have been plenty of Superman comics around. Nevertheless, it was a good way to kick-start the movie series again and as such, the game follows suit. Although it was intended to be released at the same time as the film, *Superman Returns* had delay after delay, leaving it to appear quite a bit after the movie. Worse of all, it's not entirely apparent what caused the delays, because it's not that impressive a game.

The freeform genre, often the candidate for movie games these days, works well for the son of Krypton as he flies across a sizable Metropolis, stopping villains and disasters from toppling the city. It also helps the game to break free from the movie story and introduces more bad guys – ala the Marvel movie games of late. The movie plot is still there, but clearly tacked on and quite uninspiring. It wasn't that great a movie and as a game plot, it hardly stays in your memory. In a novel change Superman can't really die. Instead, Metropolis has a health gauge that

replenishes itself between disasters. How the city even survived in Superman's absence boggles the mind, because barely a few minutes go by without robots, meteorites, fires, dragons and so on attacking it with a vengeance. Enemy situations usually demand Superman cycling his powers to counter them; for example, super-breath for a fire or laser beams for ice rocks. It's all very simple and should work theoretically. Even Superman's flying and walking can be switched so that you don't plough into the ground or accidentally take flight in the middle of a fight.

But the controls actually suck and the 360's own lousy D-pad does nothing for it. The city is also particularly bland, perhaps because it had to scale between older and newer hardware. On a next-gen system, this game really just doesn't stand out. It's maybe good as a budget buy, but *Superman Returns* lacks imagination and the small touches. The missions aren't that interesting and the combat system even less so. It's like the entire game did everything almost right, which overall does nothing for it. **NAG**

## SUPERMAN RETURNS (PS2)

RRP: R375

Score: 65/100

Like *Just Cause*, the next-gen game was clearly held back by the current-gen version. However, unlike *Just Cause*, even the PS2 version doesn't impress that much.





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## VITAL INFO

## Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

## Suggested Retail Price

R279

## Developer

4HEAD Studios

## Publisher

JoWood

## Supplier

Apex Int

## Genre

Strategy

## Age Restriction

7+

## Specifications

CPU: 1.8GHz

Video: DirectX 9.0-compatible

128MB graphics card

RAM: 512MB

HDD: 3GB

CD/DVD: CD-ROM

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## BOTTOM LINE

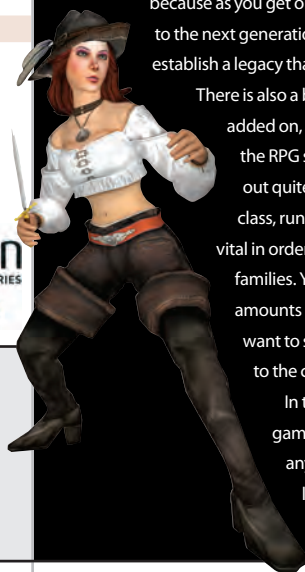
A little of everything wrapped up into one explosive game.

**89/100**

## THE GUILD 2

**A** LOT CAN BE SAID for JoWood's new title, *The Guild 2*. It is for one a game of multiple genres including being a full-on RPG as well as a simulation. However, let us first look at the RPG side.

The player will get all the usual things that an RPG usually offers including levels, classes and experience points, which can be spent on skills. It also has its own combat system that works a bit like *Baldur's Gate*. Earning money is of vital importance to be able to buy new armour and weapons, as well as buying presents for that special someone that you have had your eye on. The game is pretty much based on starting a family and having kids, because as you get older and die, the game passes on to the next generation and so forth while trying to establish a legacy that will live through the ages.



There is also a business and political simulation added on, which coincides very well with the RPG system and balances the game out quite nicely. Depending on your class, running a business is also absolutely vital in order to keep ahead of other rival families. You will need to give equal amounts of time to all three areas if you want to succeed in the game, so get used to the concept of time management.

In the end, this is a brilliant little game that has sailed in with hardly any fanfare. It is fun and intuitive, leaving the player wanting more.

**NAG**

## VITAL INFO

## Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

## Suggested Retail Price

R199

## Developer

Enlight Studios

## Publisher

Enlight Studios

## Supplier

Apex Int

## Genre

Management

## Age Restriction

3+

## Specifications

CPU: Pentium III 1GHz

Video: 64MB Graphics Card

RAM: 256MB RAM

HDD: 1GB HDD

CD/DVD: 4x CD/DVD-ROM

Internet: Not required

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## BOTTOM LINE

A nice challenge for zoo management fans.

**64/100**

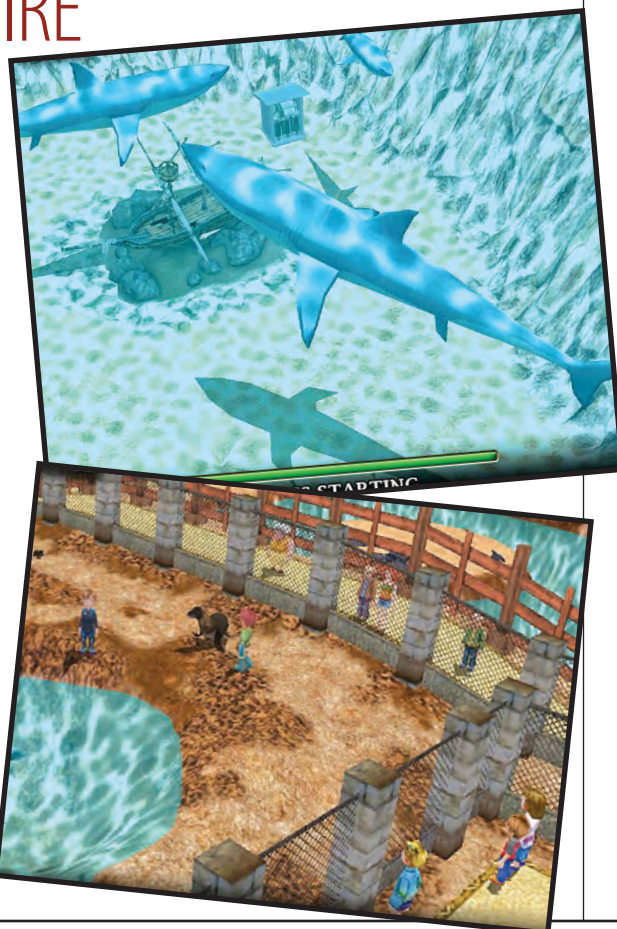
## MARINE PARK EMPIRE

**D**ESPITE WHAT THIS GAME'S title might suggest, *Marine Park Empire* is not just about building and running a marine park, but offers a variety of land animals too. In fact, once installed, this game will probably have you wondering if you bought *Zoo Tycoon* instead.

As a management title, *Marine Park Empire* does, at times, seem a bit overwhelming and unnecessarily complex. The campaign-like tutorials offered in the game do a lot to help new users master the controls and understand the play dynamic, but are tedious to sieve through for more experienced players.

The game does have many features that will please fans of the genre. *Marine Park Empire* is loaded with accessories for your zoo, including train and boat rides that can be built into the parks. There is a substantial list of Scenarios and the Free Game mode gives users the chance to let their creativity run wild, especially with the option of 'Unlimited' cash. The ability to experience your beautifully animated zoo with 3D camera angles is also a rewarding experience.

Overall, the game is very involved, with a lot needed from the user to complete tasks and keep the zoo in functioning condition, and will keep management fans busy for a good many hours. If zoo management is your thing, you'll definitely enjoy adding this title to your collection. However, it's unfortunately not a game for beginners as this title is more likely to frustrate than inspire. **NAG**





## VITAL INFO

### Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	<b>PSP</b>
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

### Suggested Retail Price

R419

### Developer

Gearbox Software

### Publisher

Ubisoft

### Supplier

Megarom [011] 234-2680

### Genre

FPS

### Age Restriction

16+

### Multiplayer

2 Players (Wireless Compatible)

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## BOTTOM LINE

Have some strategic fun killing Germans in World War II... again.

**70/100**

# BROTHERS IN ARMS D-DAY

**D**-DAY IS A FIRST-PERSON shooter that forces the player to use tactics and cover fire to achieve the mission objectives. The game is set in World War II, the night before D-Day, and centres around the exploits of Sgt. Matt Baker and his squad of parachute infantry. All your missions are linked to objectives that move the story along, and considerable effort has been taken in getting the atmosphere and feel of being behind enemy lines, with the weight of the free world resting on your shoulders, just right. A feat made even more remarkable considering the size and graphical limitations of a handheld platform. That said, the graphics are a little bland and lack detail, but overall crisp and clean enough to ensure you can see where you're going and who you're about to shoot. A typical game involves navigating the map, taking cover from enemy fire and suppressing the enemy with some of your own fire. Once they're too scared to stick their heads up, you can order members of your squad to flank and eliminate them or you can go yourself. There's also a 'situational awareness view' you can enter while playing to gain an overall picture of where everyone is on the map, but this is so poorly implemented, its purpose is completely negated.

Most of the missions follow this exact same rinse and repeat prescription, so if this style of play doesn't rock your world you might be better off trying something else. It's a good game, in fact one of the better titles of this kind on the PSP, and if you like the strategic play elements it should keep you entertained. **NAG**



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## VITAL INFO

## Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

## Developer

PopCap

## Publisher

PopCap

## Supplier

Xbox Live Arcade

## Genre

Arcade

## Age Restriction

12+

## Multiplayer

1-4 players

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## BOTTOM LINE

It has its problems, but it's also very addictive and a lot of fun.

80/100

## HEAVY WEAPON

THE RED MENACE IS invading! The Allied forces are down on their knees! There is only one hope left: The Atomic Tank! During the Cold War anything with 'atomic' in it had to be super-powerful and that is no less true with this tank, capable of repelling hordes and hordes of oncoming enemy units. Your own forces support you as well by dropping power-ups and other upgrades. You can finish the 19 level campaigns, which support two players, or get up to four players in the survival mode. Sure, *Heavy Weapon* isn't very

creative and veterans of action-shooters of this nature will find it pretty easy – at first, at least. However, it's a ton of fun and great for multiple players. Much like any game where enemy after enemy come towards you in ever-larger packs, it's about surviving. That's complemented with massive weapon load-outs, though the game could use more enemies and more weapons. Perhaps those will appear on the download list soon. So it's flawed, but *Heavy Weapon* is still easily worth the cash. **NAG**



## VITAL INFO

## Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

## Suggested Retail Price

R 399

## Developer

Left Field Productions

## Publisher

Activision

## Supplier

Megarom [011] 234-2680

## Genre

Parlour

## Age Restriction

12+

## Online

Yes

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**For the Fans**

## BOTTOM LINE

Play the man not the cards, that is the golden rule in poker. Sadly, the developers had a good idea but the implementation is just awful.

34/100

## WORLD SERIES OF POKER: TOURNAMENT OF CHAMPIONS

WHEN *WORLD SERIES OF Poker: Tournament of Champions* arrived at the office, it was no secret that we were very eager to start playing. Sadly, our excitement was short-lived. First, there were long loading times. When the game finally started, we were even more disappointed at the low-quality graphics. However, the biggest gripe we had with this title was the game dynamic. Unlike most traditional Poker games, this one tries to mimic the type of Poker game you see on TV. This means there are annoying commentators (Norman Chad and Lon McEachern – we rest our case), and waiting for the camera to pan around is even worse. This game does have one thing going for it and that is that you get to play against most of the Poker pros you see on TV, such as Joseph Hachem, Scotty Nguyen, Men "The Master" Nguyen and Antonio Esfandiari. Then again, you are simply playing against the game AI.

The game also has online capabilities, but that merely takes the offline game and allows you to play against other players. You can chat over VoIP to your opponents and create a custom character. There is even a career mode, but the story line is rather cheesy and we lost interest after the second game in our career.

In all honesty, *Texas Hold 'em* on Xbox Live Arcade is a much better adaptation of this card game we love so much. There are no fancy graphics or long loading times and the game moves along pretty fast. Just the way we like it. **NAG**





## VITAL INFO

### Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

### Suggested Retail Price

R419

### Developer

Gusto Games

### Publisher

Oxygen Interactive

### Supplier

Apex Interactive

### Genre

Sport

### Age Restriction

3+

### Multiplayer

Yes ( up to 4)

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**For the Fans**

## BOTTOM LINE

An original control system cannot save an ordinary golf game.

**65/100**

# PROSTROKE GOLF – WORLD TOUR 2007



THE CLUE TO THIS golfing title's selling point lies in its name. A unique control system really isn't much to get excited about these days, but then that typifies *ProStroke Golf*. Uninterested in aesthetics, much to its own detriment, it's more concerned with recreating a faithful representation of its real-life counterpart.

The controls do lend themselves in a realistic fashion. Shots are played looking down at the ball. Flicking the right analogue stick produces swing while the left analogue stick focuses on balance. Shifting the balance to the right foot creates a lofted, spinning shot, and shifting to the left generates flat punches. The system is intuitive and admirably gives the player a lot more to ponder than most other golfing titles.

Unfortunately for *ProStroke* the rest of the game doesn't live up to its clever controls. The number of modes available, for instance, are as sparse as the hairs on Jim Furyk's head. Career mode, a 5-year slog that challenges the player to go from a golfing nobody to World Number 1, revolves around earning 'renown' to compete in ever more elite tournaments. It's fairly interesting for the first year or so but soon becomes a most tiresome affair.

The lack of modes intensifies the feeling that the game is basically a rush-job, a sentiment compounded by the shoddy graphics, appalling commentary and baffling course editor. The innovative control system is great, but *ProStroke Golf* is lacking in too many important areas to be considered a top game. **NAG**



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## VITAL INFO

## Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

## Suggested Retail Price

R299

## Developer

Wicked Studios

## Publisher

Lighthouse Interactive

## Supplier

Apex Interactive

## Genre

Adventure

## Age Restriction

7+

## Specifications

CPU: Pentium III 1GHz or AMD equivalent

Video: 32MB Graphics Card

RAM: 256MB

HDD: 1.4GB

CD/DVD: CD-ROM

Players: 1

Internet: Not required

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## BOTTOM LINE

An average adventure title with a less than average story

**63/100**

## KEEPSAKE

**A** STORYLINE IS TO ADVENTURE gaming what outer underwear is to Superman: without it, you have an ugly situation on your hands. If there aren't enough twists and turns in the journey, and if the story isn't interesting enough, it doesn't matter how good the rest of the game is. *Keepsake's* tale is promising at first but soon forgets to provide intrigue and mystery, and quickly degenerates into a snore-inducing snooze-fest.

The player takes the role of Lydia, a young woman attending the Magic Academy for her first time. Our heroine discovers the school to be devoid of pupils and staff and so her quest begins to get to the root of their disappearance.

Slightly off-kilter to your traditional point-and-click game, *Keepsake* is more in line with the *Myst* mould of adventure titles. Littered with original and challenging puzzles, it certainly provides a stern challenge to the player. Unfortunately the story in between is where the game falls flat.

And it's not only the poor storyline that makes this a decidedly average adventure title. As puzzles only unlock when a certain story waypoint is reached, the game soon becomes a dull procession of hunting down and revisiting puzzles to check if they're available yet. The voice acting is absolutely atrocious and animation sequences appear to have been created with decade-old technology.

The game's half-decent rating owes itself largely to the beautifully created environments and, of course, the puzzles. Sadly, though, as an entertaining, absorbing adventure title *Keepsake* just doesn't cut it. **NAG**



## VITAL INFO

## Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

## Suggested Retail Price

R299

## Developer

VSTEP

## Publisher

Lighthouse Interactive

## Supplier

Apex Interactive

## Genre

Simulation

## Age Restriction

3+

## Specifications

CPU: Pentium 4 2GHz or AMD equivalent

Video: 64MB Graphics Card

RAM: 512MB RAM

HDD: 300MB HDD

CD/DVD: CD-ROM

Internet: Not required

Players: 1

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## BOTTOM LINE

A striking, well structured game let down by inane missions.

**60/100**

## SHIP SIMULATOR 2006

**C**AN YOU FAULT A game that perfectly depicts its subject yet bores its audience to tears? Maybe some things just aren't meant to be simulated, like weeding gardens, knitting socks, and steering ships. However, perhaps we should backtrack here because a ship simulation sounds interesting and at least relatively exciting. So why the lingering negativity?

*SS2006* is flawless in its approach and its attention to detail is laudable and inspiring. The title promises action and entertainment of wave-crashing proportions, but, alas, it proves only to be as dull as dishwater.

From a bland menu the player is presented with 40 missions filled with various goals. It's here where the problems begin. Stale, tedious objectives thrive like inert barnacles on a sperm whale. The level designers should be sent to walk the plank. Travel here, pick up people, travel there, drop off cargo. In the distance a ship's horn sounds: BOR-ING! One mission even has you steering a ship in the same direction for a soul-destroying, non-interactive 20 minutes!

The lack of imagination is immensely frustrating as *SS2006* has the base for an excellent game. We could be rescuing the crew of a capsized yacht in tsunami-like conditions, but instead we get to pootle along on pristine, calm waters.

Thank Neptune for the loving detail assigned to the water effects and the painstaking precision and accuracy afforded to each of the eight vessels available for use. However, that sinking feeling will not pass. *Ship Simulator 2006* is just fantastically dreary.





# THE BATTLE BETWEEN HEAVEN AND HELL

IS ABOUT TO BEGIN A DECISIVE CHAPTER...



# INFERNAL

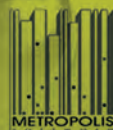
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## VITAL INFO

### Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

### Suggested Retail Price

R419

### Developer

Ubisoft

### Publisher

Ubisoft

### Supplier

Megarom [011] 234-2680

### Genre

Action/Adventure

### Age Restriction

12+

### Multiplayer

Yes



## BOTTOM LINE

Oh-so-iconic, right through to running around the Death Star and making lightsaber sounds with your mouth.

**70/100**

# STAR WARS: LETHAL ALLIANCE

**L**ETHAL ALLIANCE STARTS OFF with a real *Star Wars* fan inspired bang. You rock up as a kick-ass Twi'lek, talk to Kyle Katarn of Dark Forces fame and then proceed to kick imperial hiney with your robot prison-break pal. The Unreal Engine-powered visuals shine on the PSP, a pleasant change from the usual PSP visuals, and you're kicking, flipping and combo-team-attacking your way around the galaxy, meeting famous people from the subject-matter and even visiting a few unique places that expand on the already vast lore. Your mission: to steal the plans to the Death Star, eventually handing them to Princess Leia. How cool is that?

But after the geek factor wears off, the game comes across as rather undemanding and seems to lack any real action pizzazz. The rather placid pace of the plot and the shallow environments eventually culminate into a yawn. We want to love it, and tell you to love it, we really do; but considering how much you're going to have to pay for it, you have to really love your *Star Wars* if you're going to be able to live with yourself in the morning if you buy it.

Multiplayer makes an appearance, but it's just a 'race to collect something before your friend' thing, and it requires two copies of the game. Cooperative would have been nice, but that would have probably required real effort on behalf of the developers. **NAG**



## VITAL INFO

### Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	WII

### Suggested Retail Price

R 449

### Developer

Vicarious Visions

### Publisher

Activision

### Supplier

Megarom [011] 234-2680

### Genre

Action

### Age Restriction

12+

### Multiplayer

Yes



## BOTTOM LINE

WHAM! BASH! WHIP! THWIP!  
SARCASTIC COMMENT FROM  
DEADPOOL! That about sums it up.

**80/100**

# MARVEL: ULTIMATE ALLIANCE



**T**HIS GAME HAS BEEN forced onto every conceivable platform known to gaming man, child and dog alike. It's on cellphones, the DS, the PSP, the Game Boy Advance, the 360, the PS2... it just never ends. We half expect it to appear on watches and in lucky packets.

The PSP version is quite nice though, no complaints there. It features the full game, all the missions found on the bigger consoles and even a few unique missions exclusive to the PSP version. There are even a few additional heroes, and an exclusive hero if you register online with the PSP for stat tracking and global leader boards.

The game is a fun romp through super-powered battles, letting you directly control one hero and indirectly three more. Combination attacks yield spectacular results, and you can even unlock older/newer costumes for each character that changes their power-sets. It's a little like *Dungeon Siege* really: you level up your heroes and an effective combination sees you through thick and thin. Bonus points when you create teams of 'traditional' heroes as they were in the comics, which boost your stats or give you better resistance against certain attacks.

Visually it cuts a few corners, getting a bit messy at points, which makes the action hard to follow, but the sheer depth of content and chutzpah in how it was all crammed onto the PSP really makes it worthwhile. Multiplayer lets you team up with other spandex buddies, but sadly requires a copy per person. Use that GameShare function more, developers! **NAG**



## VITAL INFO

## Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

## Suggested Retail Price

\$8.99

## Developer

Telltale Games

## Publisher

Telltale Games

## Distributor

Telltale Games (www.telltalegames.com)

## Genre

Adventure

## Age Restriction

All

## Multiplayer

No

## Specifications

OS: Windows XP

CPU: 800MHz (if using a graphics card with hardware T &amp; L); 1.5GHz (if using a graphics card without hardware T &amp; L)

Video: 32MB 3D-accelerated graphics card

RAM: 256MB

HDD: 240MB

## BOTTOM LINE

It's great, but feels far too much like the first two chapters to impress.

65/100

SAM & MAX:  
THE MOLE, THE MOB  
AND THE MEATBALL

THE NEXT EPISODE IN *Sam & Max's* ongoing adventures is out in timely fashion and brings even more for fans of the duo. This time, a mole has gone missing at Ted E. Bear's Mafia-Free Playland, a casino run by mobsters wearing giant bear heads. Soon the freelance police are (accidentally) invited to join the mob by completing two (sorry, three) tasks to prove their worth. Overall the writing and comedy is still what we expect – no disappointment there. The problem is that the game is nearly exactly the same as the previous two. There are new locations, but you still start in your office and you still have big puzzles that involve Bosco and Sybil. Hey, we like these characters, but it would be nice to spend most of our time at several other locations. Maybe Sybil should close shop for an episode or Bosco should just lounge behind the counter. At this stage, it doesn't feel like the games are really exploring the world that lies in front of fans. It's not that we didn't enjoy this chapter, but there's definitely something lacking. Maybe Telltale should have opted for every second month and given more time to new locations, advancing the puzzle system and making things a little harder. *The Mole, The Mob and the Meatball* has great moments, and the mobsters themselves are really, really cool. At the end, we're just really tired of constantly going to the same characters in each



episode. Why not open more of the shops on the street or add more than one extra location to travel to? Hopefully things will be geared up in the fourth part, so we're not worried. Even great TV shows have dull episodes. **NAG**

## VITAL INFO

## Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	GBA	MOB

## Suggested Retail Price

R341

## Developer

Krome Studios

## Publisher

Sierra

## Supplier

MiDigital [011] 723-1967

## Genre

Platformer

## Age Restriction

7+

## Specifications

Players: 1

Multiplayer: No

Game share: No

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## BOTTOM LINE

It's fun and kids might dig it, but not really worth the effort.

69/100

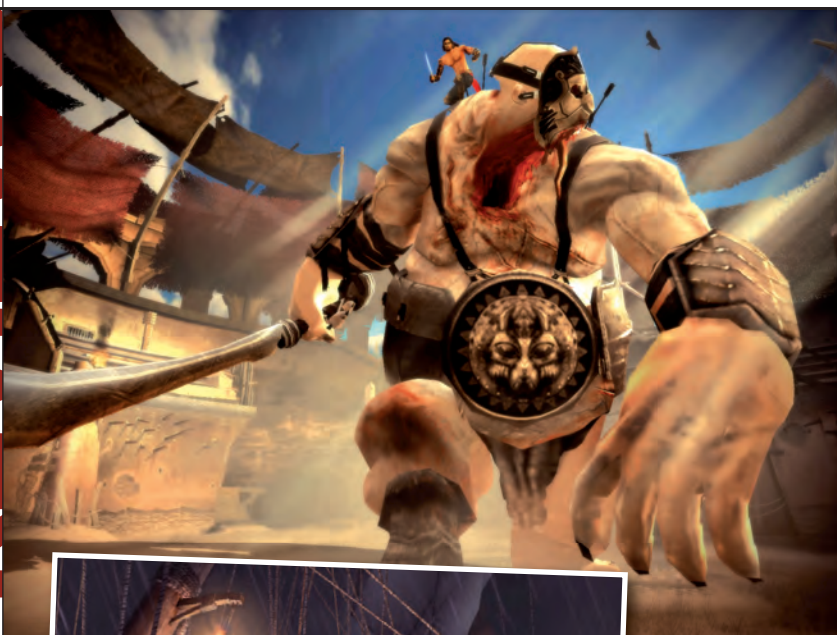
THE LEGEND OF  
SPYRO: A NEW  
BEGINNING

KROME STUDIOS HAS DONE well for itself with its *Spyro* series - no doubt about that. *A New Beginning* is a 'reboot' of the series, however, letting the little purple dragon start over from scratch so that Krome can tell his story in a new way. The GBA incarnation is, of course, a rather haphazard implementation of the idea (which is better experienced on PS2, truth be told). The game is a stock standard platformer with cute, if slightly undefined artwork, and a variety of abilities that Spyro gains as he rescues several of his dragon-kin. In between the levels are several mini-games in the flavour of whack-a-mole and even a side-scrolling shooter.

The GBA version falls very short in several areas, mainly in the sound department. Sound effects are badly sampled and crackle over the speakers, while the music, often non-existent, resorts to simple low drones and tones - a far cry from the energetic and crisp music we've come to expect from GBA titles (and the more recent DS titles). The game itself gets old fast. Spyro has a limited set of attacks and the elemental powers you gain are all the same for the most part, just with different graphics. It's easy to understand why a GBA version was created. There's nothing wrong with trying to make a quick buck with a popular system, but it feels as if Krome could have done a much better job (especially considering the PS2 version). **NAG**







## PRINCE OF PERSIA TRILOGY

**PLATFORM:** PS2  
**GENRE:** Action  
**DEVELOPER:** Ubisoft  
**DISTRIBUTOR:** Megarom [011] 234-2680

**RRP:** R449  
**AGE:** TBA  
**PUBLISHER:** Ubisoft

ALL THREE OF the new *Prince of Persia* games in one package? Great! And when you come down to it, we can't even be sarcastic while saying that. For the price, getting all three titles for the PlayStation 2 in one box, complete with their individual manuals, is a bargain. The older console we used for testing wasn't that fond of some of the games and bugs showed up, but these didn't appear on a PS2 Slim, so it's probably a hardware legacy issue. As for the games themselves, they aged well. The latter two are still fairly crisp since they aren't that old, but even *Sands of Time* has no problem showing why it's one of the most significant games ever developed. The prince is best controlled with an analogue controller, so if you never got around playing the first – or any of the new *POP* games – you should own this. As a gift, it's also great value, since there should be at least one title in the pack a gamer will enjoy. **NAG**



## AGE OF EMPIRES COLLECTOR'S EDITION

**PLATFORM:** PC  
**GENRE:** Strategy  
**DEVELOPER:** Microsoft Game Studios  
**DISTRIBUTOR:** Megarom [011] 234-2680

**RRP:** R89  
**AGE:** 13  
**PUBLISHER:** Ubisoft

THE QUESTION ISN'T SO much who will buy this than whether there is anyone left who doesn't own *Age of Empires* but wants it. Or maybe your copies have slowly gotten lost or damaged. Maybe there's just a need to introduce someone to the slower pace of *AOE*'s strategy. Maybe you just like hanging around in the Bronze Age. Regardless, here's a chance to get both the *Age of Empires* games along with their respective expansions – *Rise of Rome* and *The Conquerors*. You'll need one incredibly rotten and ancient machine not to be able to run these, so it's almost a given the games will work for whoever owns a PC (the budget collection will need a DVD drive, though). This edition also contains a compilation of the series' soundtrack, something fans and game music enthusiasts will enjoy. However, there have been so many *Age of Empires* collections, box sets, and budget buys, so this is just the series continuing its budget reign for a while longer. **NAG**



## FORGOTTEN REALMS DELUXE EDITION

**PLATFORM:** PC  
**GENRE:** RPG  
**DEVELOPER:** Various  
**DISTRIBUTOR:** Megarom [011] 234 2680

**RRP:** R299  
**AGE:** 12+  
**PUBLISHER:** Atari

ONE GREAT ADVANTAGE OF publishing for a license is that one day (hopefully) you can have budget bundles to pawn off at low prices to masses of fans. Atari has never rested on its laurels to get mileage out of the Forgotten Realms games it has been responsible for (or bought from embattled publishers). There are *Neverwinter Nights* sets, *Baldur's Gate* sets and so on. Now all of them are brought together in one big bundle. This set includes both *Baldur's Gate* games and their expansions, both *Icwind Dale* and the one expansion, plus *Neverwinter Nights* and both its expansions. All of these packages, though, have been released before. For example, the *Baldur's Gate* portion is really the *BG 4-in-1* box set brought out a year or so ago. Nevertheless, here they all are in one nice box that looks more like a movie DVD box set than what we usually see for games. And the whole thing costs as much as a single triple-A PC title. Bargain? Obviously. **NAG**



# PLANAR CHAOS

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## DUNGEON SIEGE: LEGENDS OF ARANNA

**PLATFORM:** PC  
**GENRE:** Action/RPG  
**DEVELOPER:** Microsoft Game Studios  
**DISTRIBUTOR:** Megarom [011] 234-2680

**RRP:** R89  
**AGE:** TBA  
**PUBLISHER:** Ubisoft

**W**HILE THE TEAM AT Gas Powered Works was tooling away at the *Dungeon Siege* sequel, Mad Doc was assigned to create a DS expansion. Smartly they opted not to make it require the original game, creating the rarely seen stand-alone expansion. Set after the events of the game and elsewhere on the game world (an island, to be specific), a new menace has arrived and you just happen to be the adventurer who will kick its ass. Travelling the land, you eventually gain a few interesting party members, all controlled by *Dungeon Siege's* very comfortable interface. Fans will also recall that Mad Doc's tweaks to the game did a lot to streamline it, especially the easier way to access potions. Some new creatures also debuted, though other small problems remained in the expansion. But it was still great; some would argue it exceeded what *Dungeon Siege* did and fans had little to complain about. Now it's a budget steal that will run on modest systems. Considering how hack and slash RPGs simply never age as quickly as anything else on the market, there's very little chance you'll get this and not be very happy with the purchase. **NAG**



## RISE OF NATIONS GOLD EDITION

**PLATFORM:** PC  
**GENRE:** Strategy  
**DEVELOPER:** Microsoft Game Studios  
**DISTRIBUTOR:** Megarom [011] 234-2680

**RRP:** R89  
**AGE:** 13  
**PUBLISHER:** Ubisoft

**F**ROM THE PEOPLE WHO got you to control Neanderthals (*Age of Empires*) came a different but similar strategy game called *Rise of Nations*. Or was it them? We're sure it might have been something else that they went on to develop. But it's easy to confuse the games since *Rise of Nations* has a lot in common with *Age of Empires*. The scope is obviously larger, leading your nation over 6,000 years of history if you count the expansion. Called *Thrones & Patriots*, it's been quite handily bundled with its parent game, thus presenting you with this Gold Edition. If you already own the *Age of Empires* collection (or gave it to someone else), *Rise of Nations* is a logical next step, plus its specifications make it within the reach of most of today's machines – even that game-hating laptop you use for work. It's also going for a steal, and the game along with its expansion is likely to keep you busy for a while. **NAG**



## AGE OF MYTHOLOGY GOLD EDITION

**PLATFORM:** PC  
**GENRE:** Strategy  
**DEVELOPER:** Microsoft Game Studios  
**DISTRIBUTOR:** Megarom [011] 234-2680

**RRP:** R299  
**AGE:** 12+  
**PUBLISHER:** Ubisoft

**W**HAT'S THAT, LASSIE? ARE you sensing overkill from Microsoft's budget offerings? Well, the *Age of Empires* sub-genre remains very popular, so nearly anything that has some ties with the series and came from Microsoft's game studios has become a budget offer down the road. In this issue we also mention *Rise of Nations* and *Age of Empires*, so who's really surprised that an *Age of Mythology Gold Edition* is also available. Like *Rise of Nations* it's the original game along with its expansion, *The Titans*. It has also aged pretty well and has very low system demands. It also sells for a dirt-cheap price, hardly breaking anyone's bank. But like the other two budget offerings it's really about the sheer value for money, and *Age of Mythology* has plenty of that. Is this the last chance you'll get this game for a budget deal? Probably not. You might as well get ready for some bundle that features all three games and their expansions in one box. But until that happens, this is a good strategy game that demands your time if you haven't played it yet. **NAG**



# SA Computer MAGAZINE



## THE THIRD COMING

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# DOOM 3

**PLATFORM:** PC  
**GENRE:** Action  
**DEVELOPER:** id Software  
**DISTRIBUTOR:** Megarom [011] 234-2680

**RRP:** R89

**AGE:** 18

**PUBLISHER:** Activision

THE BEHEMOTH HAS COME, gone, spawned an expansion and since lost ground to the Unreal Engine 3 and that lousy attempt we generally refer to as *Quake 4*. Now after the hype has gone and the dust has settled, *Doom 3* moved more than its share of units to qualify as a budget release. Enough time has passed as well so that mid-range machines won't have any problem pushing the game to its best-looking charm. Throw in the patches, mods and other improvements the game has seen over the past few years, and you've got a nice package in this buy. Consider the price tag, and it's a must-buy. The only real complaint we have is that a bundle that included the expansion *Resurrection of Evil* would have been so much nicer. But it would probably cost a bit more and ninety bucks for *Doom 3* should be a no-brainer for shooter fans. The pack also includes the complete full-colour manual. **NAG**



## RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN EXTENDED EDITION

**PLATFORM:** PC  
**GENRE:** Action  
**DEVELOPER:** Gray Matter  
**DISTRIBUTOR:** Megarom [011] 234-2680

**RRP:** R89

**AGE:** 16+

**PUBLISHER:** Activision

THE GAMING WORLD GIVES *RTCW* a lot of credit, and deservedly so. Not only did it give us a great new game in the *Wolfenstein* series, including more robo-Nazis, but it also brought along the insanely popular *Enemy Territories*. While the world (especially those with top-end machines) is eager for the release of its sequel, *Quake Wars*, *ET* lives on online. This bargain bundle includes *RTCW* as well as *ET* in one package, plus *RTCW*'s manual. Just in case you've been living under a rock, *RTCW* is one of the best action-orientated FPS games from recent years and a definite classic. It will also work perfectly on mid- and lower-range machines, while the gameplay is still on par with other FPS options going around today. Sure, it does show its age, but it carries that age well and there's little else wrong with the game. It's a pity a sequel or expansion was never conceived... **NAG**



## CALL OF DUTY DELUXE EDITION

**PLATFORM:** PC  
**GENRE:** Action  
**DEVELOPER:** Infinity Ward  
**DISTRIBUTOR:** Megarom [011] 234-2680

**RRP:** R89

**AGE:** 16+

**PUBLISHER:** Activision

YEAH, OKAY, ACTIVISION SNUBBED PC gamers and sent *Call of Duty 3* to consoles only. Now it is rumoured to have made an about-turn and the fourth game might be PC-bound after all. In the meantime, you can occupy yourself with the first game and its expansion. Unfortunately *COD* had the misfortune of *Call of Duty 2*, which took the series and genre up a few notches. In that light, *COD* hasn't aged that well, mostly because if you're familiar with the second game you'll miss some of those nice touches and the gorgeous smoke effects. But it remains the game that really broke the WWII shooter genre into the mainstream, regardless of *Medal of Honor*'s most valiant efforts beforehand. *United Offensive*, the expansion, rounds the bundle off nicely and it's still an intense and addictive shooter. On top of that it should run on nearly anything. Alas, no nice manual. **NAG**



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# MOBIZINES

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SOMETIMES A GAME DOESN'T MAKE IT IN TIME TO BE REVIEWED FOR AN ISSUE. HOWEVER, WHILE YOU WAIT ANOTHER MONTH FOR OUR FINAL WORD, HERE'S OUR INITIAL OPINION ON WHAT'S NEW:



## SUPREME COMMANDER [PC]

PEOPLE HAVE BEGUN COMPLAINING about the reviewer's away message being a constant "*Supreme Commander*" the last few days. It should probably have been something like "Do not disturb for anything less than *Spore*," but that would take too long to type, wasting precious seconds that could be spent mercilessly crushing enemy units and cackling with glee. The game is much what anyone who played the multiplayer Beta would expect. For those who missed it, we have the demo on the DVD for you this month, procured through great sacrifice and late-burned DVD masters. The single-player is pretty good, and there are some nice innovations, though nothing genre shattering. But after this, playing any other RTS without *SupCom*'s extreme zoom will probably seem like trying to read *War and Peace* through a dirty fishbowl. The more people who jump on this game, the more locals there will be to play it with online. So everybody get it, now! That's an order!



## GHOST RECON: ADVANCED WARFIGHTER 2 [360]

THE GHOSTS ARE BACK. It was to be expected, though, considering *GRAW*'s success. We don't have the game yet, but we expect it to arrive before the next issue is due. In the meantime, we, like many people, spent some time with the demo released on Live. Graphically the game has been ramped up quite a bit from the first game, probably thanks to the arrival of *GOW* and *Vegas*. Speaking of which, *Vegas*' control system is a bit friendlier, but if you are familiar with *GRAW*, you'll have no problem playing the sequel. A few nice touches abound, such as the ability to pilot drones and mules. But the demo doesn't show much of the team system or the really nice graphical changes made in the sequel – still, we're sure those will not disappoint. It'll probably impress fans and make enough money. But will it bring back *GRAW*'s Live dominance? We'll know soon enough.



## BATTLESTATION MIDWAY [360]

AT FIRST GLANCE *MIDWAY* looked a bit like an arcade shooter. You pilot your little tugboat PT cruiser thing around the water and shoot down incoming airplanes. Later, things got a bit more complex though, and we found ourselves assigning crews to fighting fire, launching torpedo bombers and telling them which targets to attack – it went all RTS on us before we knew it, even though you can manually pilot any of the vehicles under your command. Before long, we sunk a battleship using a neat rotation of fighters, dive bombers and torpedo bombers. The game doesn't really guide you and we refused to look at the manual, but even then the learning curve is surprisingly sweet. Visually *Midway* isn't looking as pretty as we think it could, but that's probably because of its 'multi-portness', and the fact that it appears on PS2 as well. We've not checked out the multiplayer yet, but it promises 8-player something.



## FINAL FANTASY XII [PS2]

IMPORTING A GAME REALLY does help when you're stuck in a PAL territory that seems to always play second fiddle to NTSC. We're only 20 hours in and already *FFXII* has rekindled our faith in the series (especially after the horror that was *X* and *X-2*). The game is pretty, the music generic and the combat is surprisingly involved for something that effectively plays itself half the time. Nowadays, we're not even playing it for the plot; we just want to buy more Gambit Targets so we can set up the Ultimate Gambit Party, where your characters literally just level themselves. In fact, *FFXII* would work great as an MMO, better than *FFXI* ironically. Stay tuned for a full review next issue, where we put some Moogles in water and see if they float.



## BAD DAY L.A. [PC]

WE HAVEN'T GOTTEN VERY far into this, but so far, it appears that if you liked the demo, you'll like the final game. There's definitely a certain charm to the game. Several disasters hit Los Angeles and you play as a bum who rushes from scene to scene, helping people out. You don't have to, but the occasional act of kindness means you can also kill people – as long as your Threat Advisory doesn't go red and you land in trouble. It looks fairly decent, but quite dated as well, and there aren't any graphical options such as changing the resolution. But in its implementation it seems to lean towards *Postal*, but with a bit more style and direction and less gross-out 'moral' decisions.



## HEROES OF ANNIHILATED EMPIRES [PC]

THIS IS A TITLE that showed significant promise while in production, but our first impression when playing it has not been that rosy. The main character, Elhant, is wonderfully cynical and intractable, and the cut-scenes are very well produced. Sadly, however, it appears that the "unique blend of RPG and RTS" is just more of the same – hero characters gaining experience that is carried forward from one mission to the next. As for the rest – well, elves, goblins, undead – the usual fantasy fare. Also, some of the game dynamics are suspect, but more play is needed before a verdict on this can be reached. Oh yes, and if you are as much of a 'fan' of StarForce copy protection as we are, you'll have issues with this one...

THESE AND OTHER REVIEWS IN OUR APRIL ISSUE



# Broadband

## ADSL

From Webonline

Options

Per Month

ADSL 3GB

**R179**

ADSL 5GB

**R299**

ADSL 7GB

**R419**

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**R599**

ADSL 15GB

**R899**

[Pricing excludes Telkom line Rental]

### Linux Starter Hosting

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Powered by

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- South African or US Servers
- Plesk Control Panel
- FrontPage Server Extensions
- Database: MySQL or Postgres
- PHP / SSI / Stats Software
- Email: 1 (POP3, IMAP, SMTP)
- Telephonic and email support

And more

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### Linux Econo Hosting

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- Plesk Control Panel
- FrontPage Server Extensions
- Database: MySQL or Postgres
- Perl, PHP, SSI Server Support
- Email: 3 (POP3, IMAP, SMTP)
- Telephonic and email support

And more

### Dedicated Server Hosting

**R1536**

per month

Powered by



- Processor: Intel Pentium IV 3 GHz
- Memory: 1024 MB DDR RAM
- Hard Disks: 2 x 80 GB SATA
- Traffic: 15 GB (Included per month)
- Additional traffic from R0.07 / MB \*
- Operating System: Linux \*\*

\* Additional traffic available from R0.09 / MB or R0.07 / pre purchased MB  
\*\* Windows operating systems are available from R1836 / month



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# LAZY GAMER'S GUIDE

## LARA CROFT TOMB RAIDER: THE ACTION ADVENTURE

IF EVER THERE WAS an ideal candidate for the LGG then this is definitely it. Not only that, but this is either the best thing to happen to gaming in a while or the worst. Hard to say really - perhaps you can get it for your parents, wife (or any other non-gamer) and see what they say.

*Lara Croft Tomb Raider: The Action Adventure* is an 'exciting new DVD game!' that requires no gaming console or computer - just your DVD player and remote control, a television, a couch and some time. Snacks are optional, but aren't you fat enough already?

This version of *Tomb Raider* is based on *Angel of Darkness* (suppress the laughter please), which is by far the worst version of *Tomb Raider* available. However, considering the target market, this shouldn't be much of an issue. One thing that is impressive is the amount of time this must have taken to put together - if you're paying attention while someone plays this you'll soon see that some unfortunate soul had to play this game through a number of times and visit all the locations while recording everything they did. This footage was then spliced together and played using an elaborate menu system. It's all rather cleverly done and will certainly put across a 'gaming' experience to anyone who plays it. So, well done then on an 'okay' and highly original version of *Tomb Raider* for the uninitiated masses. **NAG**



### CRITICAL INFORMATION

**PLATFORM:** DVD Player  
**RRP:** £149.00  
**SUPPLIER:** Greenstone Interactive  
 [021] 557-6248  
**GENRE:** Action Adventure  
**AGE RESTRICTION:** 3+

It's Lara Croft but not as you know her...  
 The marketing hype is clearly not aimed at gamers with phrases like, 'Exciting new DVD game!' and 'Lara Croft for everyone.' Pity they chose *Angel of Darkness* - not exactly Lara's finest moment

### REMOTE CONTROLLED

The up, down, left, right and okay or enter buttons control the action. The basic game dynamic works by showing a short video sequence followed by a series of options linked to your remote controller's buttons displayed in the right-hand bottom corner of the screen. Depending on which option you select such as climb up, move right, jump etc., the next short sequence will play out. By using this smart 'menu' system players can work through the game - if they make the right combination of choices that is. In some instances players will be required to press a single button repeatedly and quickly to achieve the current objective or even move a crosshair around the screen to shoot a bad guy. Sure it's limited and uncomplicated, but isn't that the perfect way to get your significant other, mom or dad into your dark and evil world of gaming.





Carry the scales of  
justice in one hand...







...and a two-ton truck in



Jump in.

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# the other.

You're a genetically enhanced agent of justice authorised to do whatever it takes to sweep the criminal scum out of Pacific City. From the streets to the rooftops, use anything you can get your hands on to show the thugs that crime doesn't pay. And for the ultimate payback, combine forces in co-op play for twice the destruction and double the retribution.

**All Justice. No Restraints.**



[XBOX.COM/CRACKDOWN](http://XBOX.COM/CRACKDOWN)

realtime  
worlds

Microsoft  
game studios



XBOX 360™



# ALIENS IN THE CORNFIELD

THIRTEEN YEARS AGO, ALIENS INVADDED EARTH. THEY CAME FROM MARS, TO PROBE OUR COWS AND SHOOT OUR CIVILIANS. BUT HUMANITY DOESN'T STAND FOR THAT KIND OF CRAP, AND THE ALIEN-BUSTING ORGANISATION X-COM STEPPED UP TO DEAL WITH THE LITTLE GREY FREAKS AND THEIR ASSORTMENT OF ALIEN PALS. SUFFICE TO SAY, THE X-COM SERIES OF GAMES REMAINS THE DEFINITIVE ALIEN-HUNTING MANAGEMENT EXPERIENCE, UNPARALLELED EVEN BY TODAY'S MODERN 'SPIRITUAL SUCCESSORS'. CREATED AND DEVELOPED BY THE GOLLOP BROTHERS, JULIAN AND NICK, X-COM BLENDED THE PERFECT MIX OF STRATEGY AND MANAGEMENT, INVOLVING PLAYERS IN BOTH THE COMBAT ASPECT OF TAKING DOWN ALIENS AS WELL AS THE LOGISTICAL BACKING BEHIND SUCH SORTIES. UNFORTUNATELY FOR FANS, THE SERIES SUFFERED A PREMATURE DEATH. HASBRO INTERACTIVE WAS SHUT DOWN IN 1999, AND ALL OF ITS INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY SOLD OFF TO INFOGRAMS (NOW ATARI). ATARI STILL HOLDS THE X-COM LABEL, BUT HAS NOT MADE USE OF IT AT ALL. WE CAN ONLY HOPE THAT ONE DAY ATARI MAY SEE FIT TO RESURRECT THE GLORIOUS X-COM SERIES, PERHAPS SOONER THAN LATER CONSIDERING THE RELATIVE STRENGTH OF THE SPIN-OFF SPIRITUAL SUCCESSOR SERIES, *UFO*. WHILE THE *UFO* SERIES IS DEFINITELY INSPIRED BY X-COM, IT IS ALMOST NOTHING LIKE THE PROGENITOR SERIES AND COMMONLY ABSOLVES ITSELF OF THE MORE INTERESTING ELEMENTS THAT RAISED X-COM TO CULT STATUS. HERE NOW, WE PAY TRIBUTE TO X-COM AND ITS FALLEN COMRADES, LOOKING BACK AT WHERE THE SERIES HAS BEEN AND WHERE IT IS GOING.

## X-COM INSPIRATION

### LASER SQUAD (1988)

Released on the ZX Spectrum and later for multiple systems, *Laser Squad* is arguably 'X-COM Zero', the source of the future titles. Julian Gollop and his team created a turn-based strategy war-game that set the tone for future turn-based strategy. Players moved their squad's team members around a map one at a time, taking actions that used up Action Points. Actions included turn, shoot, pick up and so forth. By using cover, military tactics and proper squad dynamics, a cunning player could easily take out the AI opponents. Even morals played a factor: if a unit witnessed the death of a team member, they could panic and run around out of control.



## X-COM ORIGINAL

### X-COM: UFO: ENEMY UNKNOWN (1994)

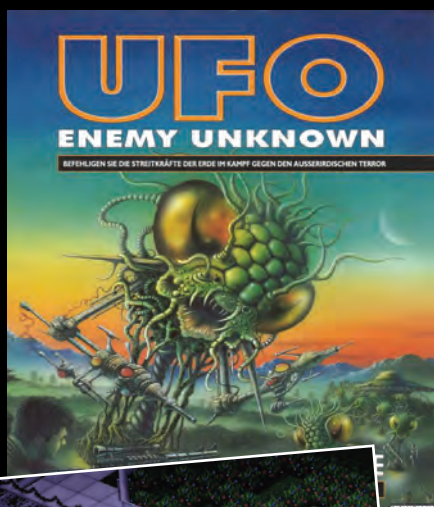
The simple strategic premise of *Laser Squad* combined with the genuinely creepy atmosphere prevalent in X-COM made *Enemy Unknown* an experience. Players controlled the X-COM organisation, building bases, sending out jets to intercept incoming UFOs and then scrambling squads to go investigate the downed craft or alien sightings.

The game was split into two views, the first being the GeoScope world view which presented a 3D map of the earth, used to track and intercept alien craft, manage base facilities, research, finance,



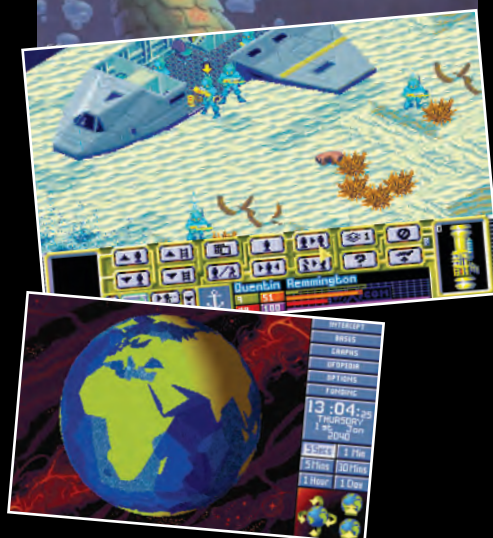
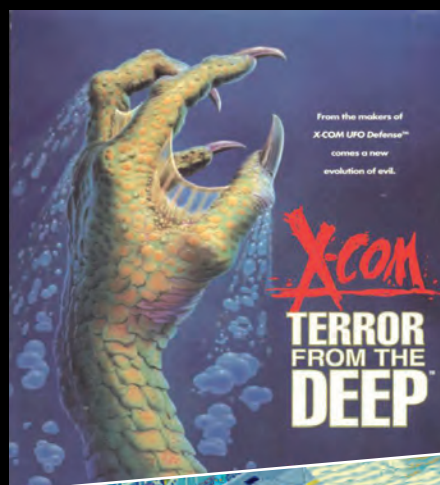
manufacturing and more. The second was the BattleScape, an isometric view of the close combat turn-based battle situation where you moved and fought with the aliens.

One of the most impressive features of *X-COM* (and not repeated in the newer offerings) was the randomly generated scenario maps. A downed UFO would cut a swath into the landscape, be it farmland or city, randomly generated so as to ensure no two experiences were ever alike. Depending on the time of day, missions would be either during daylight or nighttime, both presenting their own set of problems. The fragile nature of soldiers, even in armour, combined with the line of sight system allowed for tense moments, ambushes and alien snipers. Aliens could also attack X-COM bases; creating unique battle situations inside the structures the player designed themselves. Research towards alien technology would present better weapons, more damage against certain aliens and new technology to research.



### X-COM: TERROR FROM THE DEEP (1994)

After the success of *Enemy Unknown*, the Gollop brothers started work on *X-COM: Apocalypse*. Their publisher, MicroProse, wanted a quick follow-up to tide fans over until *Apocalypse* was complete and licensed the source code of *Enemy Unknown*. They produced *Terror from the Deep*, which on the surface looks very much like a simple skin change for *Enemy Unknown*, but also houses new features and ended up being much more difficult. *Terror from the Deep* had players defend the earth from the rising alien menace, surfacing from the oceans. The game played out underwater, with base building and combat being totally submerged. The attention to detail was astounding: players could research the rich, complex history of the aliens and their societies while the underwater battles engaged them in claustrophobic battles compounded by the limited visibility in the water.





### X-COM: APOCALYPSE (1997)

Things changed dramatically with *Apocalypse*, but somehow managed to stay unerringly true to the nature of the first two titles. *Apocalypse* zoomed in on the action more, replacing the world-view with a much more dramatic CityScape view, which contained all the management and interception. The BattleScape remained mostly unchanged, except for the vastly improved graphics and control over squads. The game takes place in a single city, Mega Primus, and this time players not only has to deal with alien incursions, but also collateral damage, diplomatic relations between several corporations that fund the X-COM operations, as well as preventing hostile alien takeovers. The BattleScape could now be played in real time with the option for pausing, though the original turn-based mode could still be used for finer control. The BattleScape in *Apocalypse* remains one of the most impressive isometric engines to date: if a grenade exploded near a strut in a shopping mall, entire structures could collapse in on themselves. Glass could be shot out (which made moving up and down in elevators rather tricky) and doors could even be blown off their hinges. Eventually through research, the player would discover the alternate dimension from which the aliens were attacking, and could launch an offensive into a strange, hostile and wild dimension.

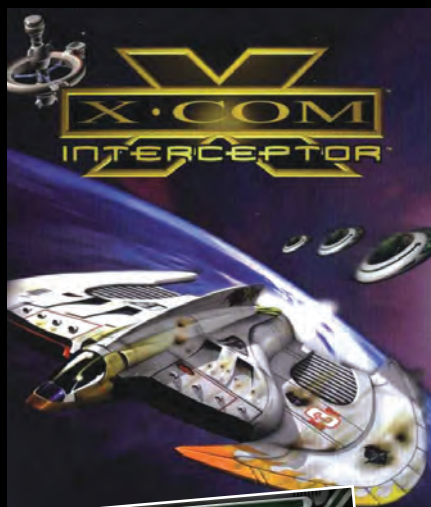


## X-COM DERIVATIVE

### X-COM: INTERCEPTOR (1998)

*Interceptor* represents the start of the fall. A massive deviation from the series norm, *Interceptor* involved space battles from

the cockpit viewpoint of an advanced space fighter. Players were tasked with defending an area of space called "The Frontier", which represented Earth's raw material mining operations. Unfortunately for Earth, a few familiar alien faces showed up, and the corporations involved got X-COM to come help deal with the threat. There was still base management and financial balancing, but in a much diluted form. Research could be done to improve weapons and to discover the origins of the alien threat, but the space combat-centric nature of the game left players feeling short-changed. Even the hyped multiplayer portion of the game was nothing more than a tacked-on feature that rarely functioned. Many fans called *Interceptor* 'X-COM meets *Wing Commander*', though most agreed that it contained only the poorer portions of both.



### X-COM: EM@IL GAMES (1999)

Hasbro quickly tried to rekindle the now dwindling interest in the X-COM series by releasing a quick multiplayer only play-by-e-mail X-COM title. The game itself was a pittance; a series of single missions with pre-placed units, which could be played against a human opponent via e-mail. Maps contained power-up crates which could double action points, damage or range. Units could not change their weapon load-outs, which were based on the types of units given to a side. After the round ended, a score was assigned to both players based on movements, stealth, firepower and so forth - so even if a player won, they could be given a 'Terrible' score if they won in a very uneconomical fashion.





#### X-COM: ENFORCER (2001)

Literally a parting shot and the most ludicrous of swansongs, *Enforcer* took the *X-COM* series further than ever from its origin. A third-person arcade shooter built on the Unreal Engine, *Enforcer* involved controlling a robotic enforcer built by a kooky professor to take out the invading alien threat. You could buy upgrades and weapons, while collecting the letters 'bonus' would advance you to a bonus level. Oddly enough, the experience itself was a blast: the over-the-top nature of the game combined with a multiplayer cooperative mode was actually fun, despite being nothing like the previous *X-COM* titles.



## X-COM CANCELLED

Three major *X-COM* titles were cancelled during the life of the series, each one an attempt to revitalise the series and expand on the *X-COM* brand. The first of these, *X-COM: Genesis*, was in development at Hasbro Interactive just after *X-COM: Interceptor* was completed. The team wanted to bring the series back to its roots and started work on a stunning fully-3D implementation of both the GeoScape and BattleScape. Hasbro had gotten it into their heads that they wanted to make the *X-COM* series a brand, with T-shirts, Saturday morning cartoons and even cereal boxes. *X-COM: Genesis* was to be that flagship title, and in the eyes of Hasbro it would be the first *X-COM* game. On 7 December 1999, the entire operation was cancelled as Hasbro Interactive management informed the developers that the studio had been shut down.

*X-COM: Alliance* was another title being developed by Hasbro Interactive in an attempt to turn the series into a brand. *Alliance* was being developed as a first-person shooter, letting the player experience *X-COM* in the role of a trooper in an *X-COM* squad. *Alliance* managed to gather respectable interest, especially when early trailers hit the Internet. *Alliance* was also dealt the fatal blow when Hasbro Interactive ceased to be, and while the license was handed over to Atari, they have expressed no interest in continuing work on *Alliance*.

The last of the cancelled titles, *X-COM: Dreamland* actually managed a much happier ending for itself. When the team was laid off, they went on to form ALTAR Interactive and continued work on *Dreamland*, which was later renamed to *UFO: Aftermath* to avoid licensing issues.

## X-COM SUCCESSORS

With *X-COM: Dreamland* saved and turned into *UFO: Aftermath*, hopes ran very high for the new spiritual succession of the *X-COM* series. Released in 2003, *Aftermath* may not have been what the fans were expecting, but it was still a damn sight better than previous offerings. *Aftermath* decided to forgo much of the turn-based nature of *X-COM*, relying more on a real time approach with pausing and various speed settings. A heavy emphasis was placed on the storyline and the almost RPG-like approach to how each soldier would level up and gain attributes and skills. Base building was entirely absent, with more focus being put on the missions themselves and almost none on the economic nature of the operations. Regardless, *Aftermath* was enough of a homage to the series and did enough right to net itself a sequel.

*UFO: Aftershock* hit shelves in 2005 and had little variation from the previous title, but did manage to introduce numerous bugs. *Aftershock* actually remains notoriously buggy, even after a host of patches. Once again, the strategic element of the series was mostly overlooked, limiting the player to basic squad management, research, development and very limited diplomacy.

Now, *UFO: Afterlight* (released in 2007) continues Altar's interpretation of *X-COM*. With a much heavier emphasis on the characters themselves, along with a more complex technology tree and even some rudimentary base building, *Afterlight* may just be the start of a return to what made *X-COM* one of the great gaming classics in the first place. **NAG**



## 45NM CHIPS ON THE HORIZON

### INTEL, AMD PLANNING 2008 LAUNCHES

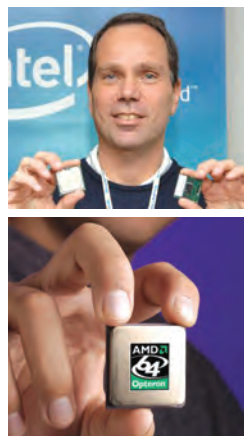
**B**OTH INTEL AND AMD have announced plans for chips on next-generation 45nm processes to ship sometime in 2008. This follows nearly simultaneous independent announcements by Intel and IBM of the development of the new 45nm fabrication processes, using hafnium-enhanced dielectrics that represent one of the biggest advances in CPU manufacturing in decades.

The new process will extend Moore's Law and roughly double the number of transistors possible in the same space as current state of the art 65nm CPUs. In addition, the introduction of new materials such as hafnium will improve manufacturing techniques and reduce heat output while increasing performance.

So far, Intel has announced Penryn, the 45nm successor to Conroe, aka Core 2 Duo. Penryn is expected to have 6MB shared

L2 cache per core pair as well as other improvements, including possibly SSE4, but still have the same electrical and thermal demands as the current Core 2 chips. AMD's announcement has been about Shanghai, the 45nm replacement for the Barcelona core. Targeted at the Opteron range for servers, the new CPU will be a quad-core design like Barcelona, but increases the L3 cache from 2MB to 6MB.

Both chips are expected to be available by Q1 2008. However, details on specific models such as whether or not AMD will have a 45nm chip for the mainstream market as well as servers aren't final yet. Recent rumours speculate that Intel may actually delay the introduction of its 45nm chips until it perceives a challenge from AMD that demands an increase in performance to keep the lead.



### FUJITSU MAKES HDD CAPACITY BREAKTHROUGH

**F**UJITSU, USING WHAT THE company calls "patterned media," has produced hard drives with a data density of 1Tb per square inch, surpassing perpendicular storage density several times. In brief, the technique is said to use "anodised aluminium to create a pattern of holes, each holding a portion of magnetic material used to store a single bit of data." The aluminium-oxide surrounding these nanoholes help magnetically insulate each bit from all the others, preventing data corruption. Fujitsu has been working on reducing the size of each nanohole to boost the data capacity of the medium since the technology's announcement in June 2005. In the latest announcement, Fujitsu has managed to decrease the pitch to 25nm from 45nm in the first incarnation of the process. Fujitsu's goal is said to be 13nm before mass production. This would allow a drive density of 4Tb per square inch, or four times the data density of the current 25nm pitch the technology uses. Drives are only expected to be available for retail by 2010.



### PLAYSTATION COST CONTROLS ON THE HORIZON

**S**ONY CFO TAKAO YUHARA announced during their quarter-end earnings that a move to 65nm for the company's PlayStation 3 console was on the way. This die shrink would be the most significant cost reduction change to the total manufacturing cost. Yuhara also indicated that the PlayStation would be receiving a component update designed to "reduce the parts" inside the console. Some insiders have speculated on the removal of the PS2 emulating EE+GS chip in favour of a cheaper and more flexible software emulation alternative. Other components

up for consolidation may be to include the Bluetooth and Wi-Fi on a single IC, all integrated into a newer Southbridge suspected of being Toshiba's Super Companion Chip. This move would also remove some features of the PS3 that have yet to be used. This move would also allow for a smaller die area, which would further drive the costs of the unit down, ultimately increasing profits for Sony and providing cheaper units for end-users.



## BLU-RAY SALES SURPASS HD DVD NEARLY THREEFOLD

**F**IGURES RELEASED BY NIELSEN VideoScan to *Home Media Magazine* report that Blu-ray movies have surpassed their HD DVD counterparts by a magnitude of up to threefold. Sales numbers submitted to *Home Media Magazine* indicate that Blu-ray discs have been outselling HD DVD by strong margins doubling sales during the first week of 2007. Making up for a total of 53.84% of sales compared to HD DVDs making up 46.14% of sales. Blu-ray pulled further ahead in the following week, increasing sales share to 61.64%. In tangible numbers that means that during the first two weeks of January, for every 100 Blu-ray discs sold, only 38.36 HD DVDs were sold.

The recent success of the format has been largely attributed to sales of the PlayStation 3, which rapidly injected the Blu-ray disc movie market with over

650,000 units (only 175,000 players that HD DVD backers announced at CES 2007 have been sold). The sales numbers of PlayStation 3 alone put Blu-ray players far ahead of HD DVD machines, which is likely a part of Sony's strategy for its format.

As a result of the limited line-up of titles on the platform, PlayStation 3 users could be using their consoles for Blu-ray disc movie playback in the meantime until more titles appear for the console, accelerating Blu-ray disc sales by a sizable amount. As far as content providers go, Blu-ray has an edge as there are more studios releasing films for the Blu-ray format than HD DVD. However, it's still far too early to call a clear winner as the standalone-unit sales figures still favour HD DVD over Blu-ray disc players.



## SEAGATE SHIPS 'WORLD'S FASTEST' HARD DRIVE

**S**EAGATE HAS INTRODUCED WHAT it claims is the world's fastest hard drive in the form of a 15,000rpm, 3Gbps Serial Attached SCSI (SAS) drive housed in a 2.5-inch shell. This drive is, however, not targeted at consumers, as it is designed for servers and enterprise-orientated storage systems. The new drives, dubbed Savvio 15K, have MTBF ratings of 1.6 million hours.

Seagate has stated that because of the Savvio 15K, companies would need 20% fewer drives than they might otherwise had with 3.5-inch drives. That means lower overtime costs. Seagate also claimed that the new Savvio drives consume two-thirds of the power of 3.5-inch 15,000rpm drives and sport a seek time that's 12% faster. Seagate will offer two Savvio 15Ks, one with 36GB of storage capacity and another with a 73GB capacity. Enterprises wanting greater-capacity drives will be steered, for now, towards Seagate's Savvio 10K.2, 2.5-inch, 10,000rpm drive. Seagate has stated that the drives would be available immediately.

## HELLO DAVE, YOU'RE MY DRIVE NOW

Stepping boldly into the cool must-have gadget market, Seagate has unveiled its Digital Audio Video Experience (DAVE), a small portable hard drive that will use Wi-Fi and Bluetooth to allow users to browse, transfer and play media and other files from phones, PCs, digital cameras and other wireless-enabled devices, as well as other DAVE units.

Aimed primarily at the mobile phone market, DAVE will provide 10-20GB additional storage without inflating the cost of the handset itself, as well as allowing service providers and network operators to offer large media and data files to subscribers. This might include downloadable video, music, audio books, and GPS data. Because DAVE interfaces so easily with devices, it also makes upgrading phones a snap, without the hassle of transferring data between handsets.

Roughly the size of a centimetre-thick credit card, DAVE weighs in at around 70g, and runs off a lithium ion battery good for ten hours of streaming media, and an impressive 14 days on standby.

## SNIPPETS

Hardware giant **Dell**'s global gaming chief Abizar Vakharia said in an interview that a gaming handheld from the company is on the radar. But a Dell spokesperson played down the comment, saying there are no plans for a handheld at this point.

**VoodooPC** debuted a laptop that includes two NVIDIA GeForce Go 7950 GTX GPUs running in NVIDIA SLI mode and powered by AMD Turion 64 X2 dual-core mobile technology as well as a 20.1" screen. Alienware has something one better with an Intel Core 2 Extreme and GeForce 8800 GTX SLI graphics.



If you find yourself in Japan, you can see if the **Gold PSP** is available anywhere. This special edition is only being released in the Far East and costs the same as a regular unit, but looks more expensive/trashy – depending on what you think of plastic gold. This brings the number of PSP colours to six.

Sharp has released a range called **Aquos**. These 37" HDTVs are apparently built specifically for games, boasting "integration of extreme performance, features and design for the hardcore gamer".



Microsoft isn't backing down in its fight to make the iPod fear its **Zune**. The family of players, according to Bloomberg, will support games by mid 2008. The problem is whether that'll be in time to thwart Apple's own gaming ambitions for its players.



## AWARDS

**T**HE NAG HARDWARE AWARD is reserved for those products that really blow us away, whether by virtue of sheer grunt, value for money, or pure unspecified sexiness. This award will only be bestowed upon products that really stand out, even to our somewhat jaded and cynical eyes, and should be considered among the primary choices when purchasing products in the respective categories. Products that receive this accolade are beyond a doubt rather special. So watch out for them and take note!





# **CPU + SANDPAPER** **MORE OVERCLOCKING**

At the high end of the hardware spectrum, there is a line. This line is typically drawn between those who will settle for merely buying good hardware, and those who will spend effort to make it better. Many may sit and look over at the other side of the line with fear of fried CPUs and destroyed components. But a journey need not be fraught with danger if one has a capable guide. Thus, we present a guide to one of the more effective performance mods: CPU re-lapping.

## **DO WHAT NOW?**

In the world of CPUs, the enemy of performance is heat. In the world of heat, the enemy of transfer is rough surfaces, which trap insulating air pockets and prevent the conduction of heat from one object to another. Some may have had experiences that show what happens when too large a gap is left between a CPU and a heatsink. Normally this occurs when one forgets or has not been educated about the use of thermal paste. However, even the best thermal paste is a poor conductor compared to copper or aluminium, but we use it because it's still far better than air.

So, if less air is good, less thermal paste should be even better. Right? Correct. But eliminating the gaps between the surfaces can be difficult. It takes a bit of patience and the right tools. Fortunately, neither of these is expensive, and a significant performance boost can be had for a very low cost, especially for those into more extreme cooling and overclocking, since we'll be improving the weakest link.

Why should we bother with this? CPUs seem relatively flat when you look at the top of the heatspreader on a modern processor. But the answer is that the coating is not flat at the molecular level, hence its dull colour. Also, the spreaders on modern CPUs are normally copper, but they are coated in another material such as zinc, which gives the grey appearance. This protects the copper from oxidation, which would degrade performance, but at the expense of thermal transfer rate. For those not planning to use a CPU more than a decade or leave it sitting around uninstalled and exposed to air for years, this coating is more a hindrance than a help. So, removing the zinc coating and improving the flatness of the heatspreader should give us a much better thermal transfer, resulting in lower temperatures and higher maximum clock speeds.

## **HOW FLAT IS FLAT?**

Flatness is a pretty simple concept. You want the entire surface of something to be at the same level. Seeing how flat something is is fairly easy when the object is large. But CPUs aren't that big, and most heatspreaders look pretty flat to the naked eye. In this case, the best way to measure flatness is by shininess. This is because an object is shiny when the light hitting it is reflected in the same direction, instead of scattered in different ways. A white piece of paper and a mirror may reflect the same amount of light, but because the paper scatters it in millions of different directions the image is blurred to an unrecognisable state, hence the paper appears blank. The mirror, on the other hand, reflects individual beams of light the same way so that an image remains coherent when bounced off it. For our CPU, the closer to a mirror it is, the flatter it will be, since irregularities in the surface disperse the light, where a flat surface will reflect it perfectly.

However, getting something to be extremely flat is a bit of a challenge. Obviously the average NAG reader isn't going to have access to industrial lapping machines. So instead, we'll have to make do with some common household (okay, hardware store) items. See box-out below.

## **FOR THIS YOU WILL NEED:**

- A CPU (we do not recommend this on old CPUs that do not have heatspreaders);
- Sandpaper of varying fineness - preferably 400 to at least 1,000, if not higher; A flat surface (we recommend a polished porcelain tile); Water; and Some paper towels or other absorbent material.



# = LESS HEAT, AND

## SANDING OFF THE COATING

The first step is to clean the CPU if it has thermal paste on it. We recommend using rubbing alcohol or if available, thermal paste remover such as Arctic Silver's Arcticclean. Then cut a strip of the lowest grade sandpaper (or you can use the whole sheet if you don't care about wasting it), and put it on the flat surface. The reason we recommend a porcelain tile for this is that the quality of the surface you use under the sandpaper will affect the quality of your result. Polished porcelain is flatter than glass, though glass will also suffice. We don't recommend wood or other surfaces though. We also recommend a grade no lower than 400 for the initial sanding. While 220 or 300 grade sandpaper will take the coating off quicker, it will take longer in later stages to sand out the imperfections introduced by the rough paper and remove much more material than the finer paper, which could be dangerous if you're overzealous and sand right through the spreader (unlikely but possible).

Next we want to wet the paper down. Why? Because wet sanding will produce better results. This will make sure the CPU slide easier allowing for a finer texture, and prevent material from the sandpaper digging into the metal of the heatspreader and becoming lodged there. It doesn't take much water for this. We recommend just rubbing a damp sponge over the sandpaper once or twice; it will spread out into plenty of water.

Then it's time to start sanding. Rotating the CPU to keep things even is a good idea, though at this stage you'll be able to tell which areas still need more work because they will still be grey/silver, while the areas that are sanded down enough will be copper. In general, rotating the CPU 90 degrees every 5-10 seconds of sanding will produce decent results. For this first and roughest stage, removing the coating is a higher priority than flatness, so keep it up until the coating is almost gone, or at least has been reduced to a few separate unlinked spots, before moving onto the next sandpaper grade.

You may notice that the water turns grey or brown as you sand. This is just a fine amount of the metal scraping off. If it gets too thick, it may get a bit difficult to make progress, so the solution here is to use the rough side of sponge to scrape it out of the surface of the paper, and then blot it away with a paper towel and re-wet the sandpaper. In the second stage of sanding (we recommend going up by 200 grade per stage, so 400-600-800-1,000-1,200), the remainder of the coating should be completely removed, and it should start getting a bit shiny. If you notice one side has more scuffmarks than the other, you're likely applying uneven pressure, or waiting too long between rotations. Once you have all the coating off, you can probably move up to the next grade of sandpaper.

Stuff you need

Sanding

First pass

Second pass





For each finer grade, the process is roughly the same. Sand for a few seconds, rotate, and sand a bit more. After you've rotated 90 degrees twice, check and see how shiny it is. If there's no noticeable change, move up to the next grade of paper. Ideally you'll want to use less pressure and shorter strokes as the stages get finer, or you'll just be digging new grooves into the surface. You may notice that after a few seconds the CPU suddenly slides easier. This is because the surface has become flatter and trapped water more evenly underneath it. This is a sign you're doing it right and should rotate it or move to the next stage.

### FINISHING TOUCHES

When you get to the final grade of paper, you'll likely want to apply no pressure at all, and just slide the CPU short distances very gently. To get a real mirror-like finish, you may even need to just do one stroke and then compare to see where the roughest marks still are, and angle the CPU to target them. When you can't get any closer to a mirror finish, you're pretty much done sanding.

Rinse off the CPU with water to flush any traces of removed metal dissolved in the water used during sanding. If you have surface preparing solutions like ArcticClean-2, using a bit on the CPU now is recommended to remove any oxidised metal left and make sure it's clean. Once wiped off, we generally prefer to 'seal in' the surface by rubbing a small amount of thermal paste into it. Since the thermal paste is designed to fill small gaps, it will fill those left after the sanding if you use a very small amount and firmly rub it with a paper towel or lens cloth. This is similar to waxing a car, and will both leave the surface shinier and protect it from dust and corrosion a bit before it is installed. If you do this, make sure to use a bit less paste than usual when mounting the heatsink as the gaps on the CPU side are already treated.

We don't recommend sanding the base of a heatsink. This is because most heatsinks are factory-finished on industrial lapping machines and will have a flatness that is beyond what can be achieved by hand with sandpaper. In general, it is only the CPU that needs this treatment, and only CPUs with coated heatspreaders. Older CPUs with direct exposed cores will already be finished to flat by the manufacturer.

### THE RESULTS

We've done this with several CPUs here at the NAG offices. So far we've had excellent results, including an X6800 that went from 54°C to 21°C (an improvement of 23°C) and a QX6700 that maxed out at 3.2GHz with 66°C load temperatures, to a new maximum of 3.66GHz at roughly the same temperature. 20°C temperature drops are not uncommon even with air-cooling if a good sanding job is applied. As for the E6700 used for our photos, it was a problem case that was constantly overheating at 3.2GHz. With sanding we were able to get it to 3.6GHz stable. **NAG**

Final pass



Thermal paste



Rub it in



Shiny!



# ASUS DVD E616A3/ E616A3T

## Silent Performer with Improved Reliability

Innovative Auto Vibration Reducing System (AVRS) provides a quiet, stable and high-performance multimedia environment.

In this modern age, digital entertainment is primarily played back on optical drives where high speed motors are a significant source of noise and instability. The latest optical drives can rotate CDs and DVDs at high speeds of up to 66 m/s, comparable to a 240km/h hurricane. This turbulent airflow coupled with the inherent vibration of the high-speed motor can result in an annoying operational noise, which can be as loud as 50dB.

The innovative AVRS is the latest advanced technology from ASUS, the leading provider of high-performance optical drives, which effectively dampens drive noise while improving stability, accessibility and playability.

### Introducing AVRS

AVRS used an active ball balancing system to reduce vibration and resonance caused by an unbalanced rotating disc. Freely running balls will automatically move to the opposite side when a rotating mass becomes unbalanced, compensating for the imbalance and returning the system to equilibrium.

The result is that AVRS effectively reduces the noise and vibration caused by an unbalanced disc, preventing any annoyances when you are trying to concentrate on work, listen to some tunes, or simply enjoying a movie without a loud whirring noise in the background. More importantly, AVRS enhances reliability and playability of the disc so that you always enjoy smooth and accurate playback.

### Unmatched Digital Playback available in both IDE and SATA

A high-end quiet drive would not be complete without similarly high-end multimedia capabilities. ASUS' latest DVD-E616A3 and DVD-E616A3T drives offer cutting-edge multimedia with superior playback capacities and high-speed data transfer in both IDE and SATA interfaces respectively. Built in advanced technologies provide users with a quiet, stable and high-performance multimedia environment.

Benefiting from the stability of ASUS breakthrough AVRS feature, both drives are capable of fast data transfer speeds of 16x for DVDs and 48x for CDs, as well as fast access times of 105ms for DVDs and 95ms for CDs (typical).

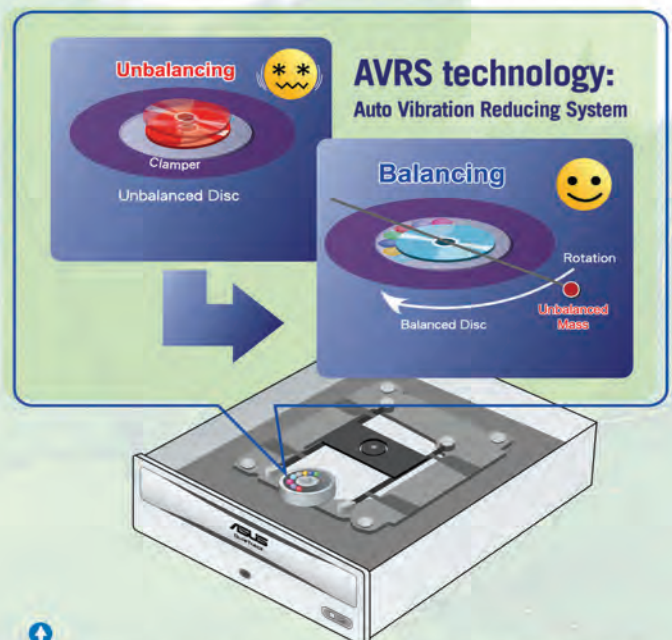
Both the DVD-E616A3 and DVD-E616A3T offer a leading-edge multimedia experience with fabulous playback capabilities that allow users to access all CDs, DVD-RAM/DVD-ROM/DVD±R/DVD±RW and DVD-Video without any compatibility issues.

Sporting a changeable white, black or silver face panel and a unique dust resistant design, along with a convenient vertical or horizontal mounting capability, ASUS's quiet, reliable and high performance drives will assuredly fit right in with the rest of your system.

### Supporting the World's Environment

Every component of the DVD-E616A3 and DVD-E616A3T were selected with care to provide peace of mind to the user and the utmost regard for the environment. Even the packaging of these latest products is made from recycled materials.

ASUS believes the importance of being environmentally friendly and has implemented "green" management and technical standards that comply with worldwide directives, including the RoHS (Restriction of Hazardous Substances) directive that restrains the use of hazardous or potentially harmful materials.



AVRS reduces of unbalanced discs lower noise and enhance readability and playability



## HP XW6400 WORKSTATION

**R**IGHT, IF YOU HAVE so much as glanced at the details on this page before actually starting to read the review, there's a question already burning in your brain. What the hell is up with the price?

Well, this HP rig is not exactly a gaming PC, you see. It's actually a far more straight-laced, hardcore professional system – after all, it clearly states in its name that this is a Workstation with a capital W.

Even so, the technology built into the xw6400, as well as HP's latest slogan "Putting the personal back in personal PC," intrigued us enough to take a closer look. There's some killer hardware inside this plain-Jane corporate rig...

We call the HP that, as its inoffensive midi-tower chassis is distinctly discrete, as are the noise levels it generates even under load. There's nothing flashy about the box whatsoever from the outside, and it looks like it could really do with some enthusiast attention!

It's on the inside that it really counts though. A pair of Intel Xeon 5130 CPUs, each running at 2GHz (with a 1,333MHz FSB) powers the xw6400, and it sports 4MB L2 cache per processor. These aren't the most powerful of the latest Xeon offerings, but provide grunt aplenty. There's also a full 4GB of ECC-registered DDR2 RAM modules running in quad-channel mode, and doing storage duties you'll find a 146GB Seagate Atlas10K5 SAS (Serial Attached SCSI) drive! All of this runs on the new Intel 5000X chipset

The graphics adapter the xw6400 comes with might not be ideally suited for gaming, but it costs as much as a running, if old, second-hand car. The NVIDIA Quadro FX1500 GPU is a professional-level 3D rendering monster in the league of the legendary FireGL series, built purely for rendering complex 3D models in environments like 3D Studio Max and Maya at real-time speeds. A certain element of this capacity can be used to play the occasional game, as we found out while testing the Workstation, but it's never going to compete with a range-topping gamer-level 3D card in modern titles.

So we modified our regular testing regime slightly to accommodate this fact, in an effort to find out how all this other powerful new hardware will affect gaming when it filters down to the consumer sector.

The latest SiSoft Sandra 2007 suite gives a good indication of raw CPU performance through its variety of processor-based tests, and these dual Xeons proved to be just incredibly powerful number-crunching monsters. CPU Multimedia Integer scores of over 220,000it/s made a mockery of everything bar faster-clocked variants of this same chip, while Floating Point results of 160,000it/s were just marginally ahead of the Core 2 Duo X6800 desktop processor. It's pretty commanding really.

On the arithmetic side, the rig continued to outperform high-end single-CPU desktops by an average margin of around 15% ranged against the X6800. It managed 36,761 MIPS and 24,677 MFLOPS respectively, fractionally behind the range-topping new AMD server offering, the Opteron 2200.

The ECC-registered RAM isn't really meant to be blisteringly fast, more like unquestionably reliable. So an average



throughput of 6,149MB/s isn't bad at all here, but we've obviously seen much faster.

But that pair of powerhouse processors isn't the only component making the desktop, and the apps you run seem to execute so quickly and smoothly - even games, which were never going to be its strongest suit (but we'll get to that in a moment). Sure, 4GB of RAM is always going to be nice, but there's something else...

It's that SAS Atlas drive primarily. It not only manages to match the throughput of the fastest of today's single SATA 3Gb/s drives at 71MB/s, but it at least halves their average seek times. The SAS interface allows the 10,000rpm drive to respond in just 5ms, compared to 10ms for the average SCSI drive, and more like 14ms for SATA desktop storage. It does make probably the majority of the noise generated by the machine, but we'll trade some dB for outright performance any day.

Onto gaming then, and the 3DMark05 results. Before the figures though, we were impressed that the Quadro in the xw ran pretty much every game we tried it on, and with this brutish workstation behind it ran them well for the most part. It doesn't really show in the synthetic benchmark result how smooth everything feels.

Five thousand five hundred 3DMarks in this last-generation of the Futuremark product is achievable with a mid-range gaming card of course, but none of these can do the high-end 3D rendering of this one at all. The bench also reveals a CPU score of very nearly





10,000, demonstrating just how well sorted the xw6400 is as an overall package. Again, it isn't what this setup is optimised for at all, but there's power aplenty there - you can rest assured.

And all this grunt is actually wrapped up in a package that is not only discreet, but impressively compact as well. It doesn't even get particularly hot, and will run all day at full tilt.

We did, mistakenly, pop into the BIOS for a look, only to be greeted by a horribly restricted, proprietary HP BIOS, which clearly makes the statement that this Workstation is intended to operate only as HP set it up to operate. Well, it might not be ideal for the fiddlers out there looking to play a little, but we suppose it must be good for achieving all the ISO certifications necessary to ensure interoperability with the range of professional software suites it's intended to spend most of its time running, not to mention outright system stability.

Still, we just can't wait to see the 1,333MHz bus appearing on

a larger line-up of Intel CPUs priced and built with the gaming consumer in mind - imagine the high-end overclocking RAM that will come out to take further advantage of this! And as for SAS storage, we know it isn't ever likely to be exactly mainstream, but for those with over-full wallets and a hankering for the ultimate storage performance, it's nice to know it's out there.

Pop a gaming GPU in this workstation and it would really be a monster machine. As it is, it's certainly a monster workstation and well worth the money if rendering performance directly relates to your office's productivity. As a showcase for some interesting technology advances - some of which are sure to influence our area of interest, and some of which we certainly hope do - well, the future looks rosy.

Consider one more thing as well: the xw6400 can be spec'd with a pair of quad-core Xeons running at 2.33GHz by the time you read this... **NAG**

## VITAL INFO

### ■ Pros

- Very powerful

### ■ Cons

- Not built for games

### ■ Supplier

HP SA 0860 001 030

### ■ Internet

www.hp.co.za

### ■ RRP

Approx. R30,000, depending on exact spec mixture

### ■ Reviewer

Russell Bennett

## SPECS

### ■ Processor type

Intel Xeon Dual Core

### ■ Processor number

5130

### ■ Clock speed

2GHz

### ■ RAM type

DDR2 SDRAM, Max. 16 GB

### ■ Hard drive interface

SAS

### ■ Hard drive size

146GB

### ■ Jacks and Plugs

8 x USB 2.0, 1 x RJ-45, 1 x Serial, 1 x Parallel, 2 x PS/2, 1 x Audio, 1 x Audio Out, 1 x Headphone, 2 x Microphone

### ■ Built-in devices

LED panel

### ■ Cabinet form factor

Mini tower

### ■ Cache

4 MB L2 cache

### ■ Chipset type

Intel 5000X

### ■ Data bus speed

1,333MHz

### ■ Weight

32.3lbs

### ■ Expansion bays

2 x internal 3.5-inch, 1 x external 3.5-inch, 2 x external 5.25-inch

### ■ Expansion slots

4 x Memory, 2 x PCI, 2 x PCI Express 8x, 2 x PCI Express 16x

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## AMD OPTERON REV F 1218

**R**EMEMBER AMD? UNTIL VERY recently, the enthusiast-favourite, plucky little underdog CPU manufacturer has with a fraction of the resources been taking the fight to Intel over the past few years; churning out budget-priced processing powerhouses ideal for gaming in particular, and partial to the dark art of overclocking as well. Whatever happened to that company?

That's precisely what we were asking in the furore following the release of Core 2 Duo processors onto the market. Pushed further back into the shadows by the technical brilliance of this new Intel architecture, everyone was just waiting for AMD to step up to the plate and hit one clear over the fence in response. Instead, all we got were notions of 4X4 multi-core computing (which Intel has since got working on a single die!), and more and more focus on the part of the chip manufacturer on their server-orientated low-power, high-performance products.

In this sector, the next-generation Opteron CPU turned into

a real product, complete with its own new socket, to be called Rev F. Rev F was to feature a 1,207-pin LGA-type CPU socket and bring support for DDR2 as well as hardware virtualisation to the AMD server line-up - very much like AM2 had unsuccessfully attempted in the desktop space. Nevertheless, we went along. But when we sent in a request for something that could at least challenge Core 2 Duo, we got a little confused when this chip arrived...

You see, this is an AM2 part. It even arrived in the same ASUS-built AM2 platform that our FX-50 and FX-62 test CPUs had been installed in. Yet this, AMD assured us, was the all-new Opteron. This scepticism, combined with a failed motherboard and topped off by bent pins on the CPU, had us reluctant to get into the testing of this part. Nevertheless, an alternative nForce 570 SLI-based



# BUDGET TOP 20

motherboard was rustled up and the components moved to this new platform. Sure enough, the CPU (carefully straightened) installed was reported as an Opteron 1218. Rev F part, AM2 package. Interesting.

This number, naturally, is a part of AMD's new naming strategy for this Opteron series. All 1xxx series Opterons are meant for single-CPU applications, 2xxx for dual-processor, 4xxx and 8xxx – well, you get the idea. The remainder of the figures indicate that this sample is the fastest in the line-up bar one, the high-power 1220 SE which clocks in at 2,8GHz and consumes some 125W of power to do so, compared to the 2.6GHz and 103W of our Opteron. So it's basically an FX-70 then, but with lower power consumption. Interestingly, all its figures match almost exactly with the old FX-55....

And yet, in performance terms, it just about precisely matches the FX-60. Sure, that's not bad – the FX-60 was an expensive chip, but then so is the Opteron 1218. Many Opteron systems also became famous in the enthusiast space for their overclocking abilities, but sadly the 1218 doesn't impress here either. The maximum we managed was a 300MHz boost up to 2.9GHz, although this limited success could also be down to the ForceWare 500-series chipset on our test motherboard. In the benchmarks, the new Xeon 5100-series processors comprehensively outgunned this Opteron in every field at a clock of 2GHz... So did the Core 2 Duo desktop-targeted parts, by the way.

If AMD do have something to address what's now becoming a rather embarrassing beat-down across the board, this isn't it, but we'd all love to see it, we're sure! **NAG**

## VITAL INFO

- **Pros**
  - Top-end performance
- **Cons**
  - Average overclocking
- **Supplier**
  - Legend Memory [011] 553-2600
- **Internet**
  - www.legendmemory.com
- **RRP**
  - TBA
- **Reviewer**
  - Russell Bennett

## SPECS

- **CPU**
  - Next-generation AMD Opteron™
  - Processor Model 1218
- **Stepping**
  - F2
- **Frequency**
  - 2.6GHz
- **HyperTransport**
  - 1,000MHz
- **Integrated Memory Controller**
  - 2.6GHz
- **Core Voltage**
  - 1.3V/1.35V
- **Wattage**
  - 103.0W
- **L2 Cache Size**
  - 2MB
- **L2 Cache Speed**
  - 2.6GHz
- **Manufacturing Technology**
  - .09 micron
- **Socket**
  - AM2
- **Cores**
  - 2

## TEST SETUP

MSI K9N Platinum SLI motherboard,  
nForce 570 SLI chipset, 1GB Corsair DDR2-  
1066 @ 800MHz, 160GB WD Raptor HDD,  
Seasonic 600W PSU, ASUS X1950 XT, X,  
Windows XP SP2, Catalyst version 6.12



1. Playboy The Mansion Gold Edition



2. CSI: Miami



3. The Settlers: Heritage of Kings



4. Splinter Cell Chaos Theory



5. Silent Hunter III



6. Heroes of Might and Magic III & IV Complete



7. Microsoft Train Simulator



8. Combat Flight Simulator 2



9. Far Cry



10. CSI: Dark Motives



11. Prince of Persia Warrior Within



12. Lock On Air Combat Simulator



13. Age of Mythology Gold Edition



14. Rise of Nations Gold Edition



15. Age of Empires Gold Edition



16. Chessmaster 10th Edition



17. Age of Empires Collector's Edition



18. Microsoft Flight Simulator 2002



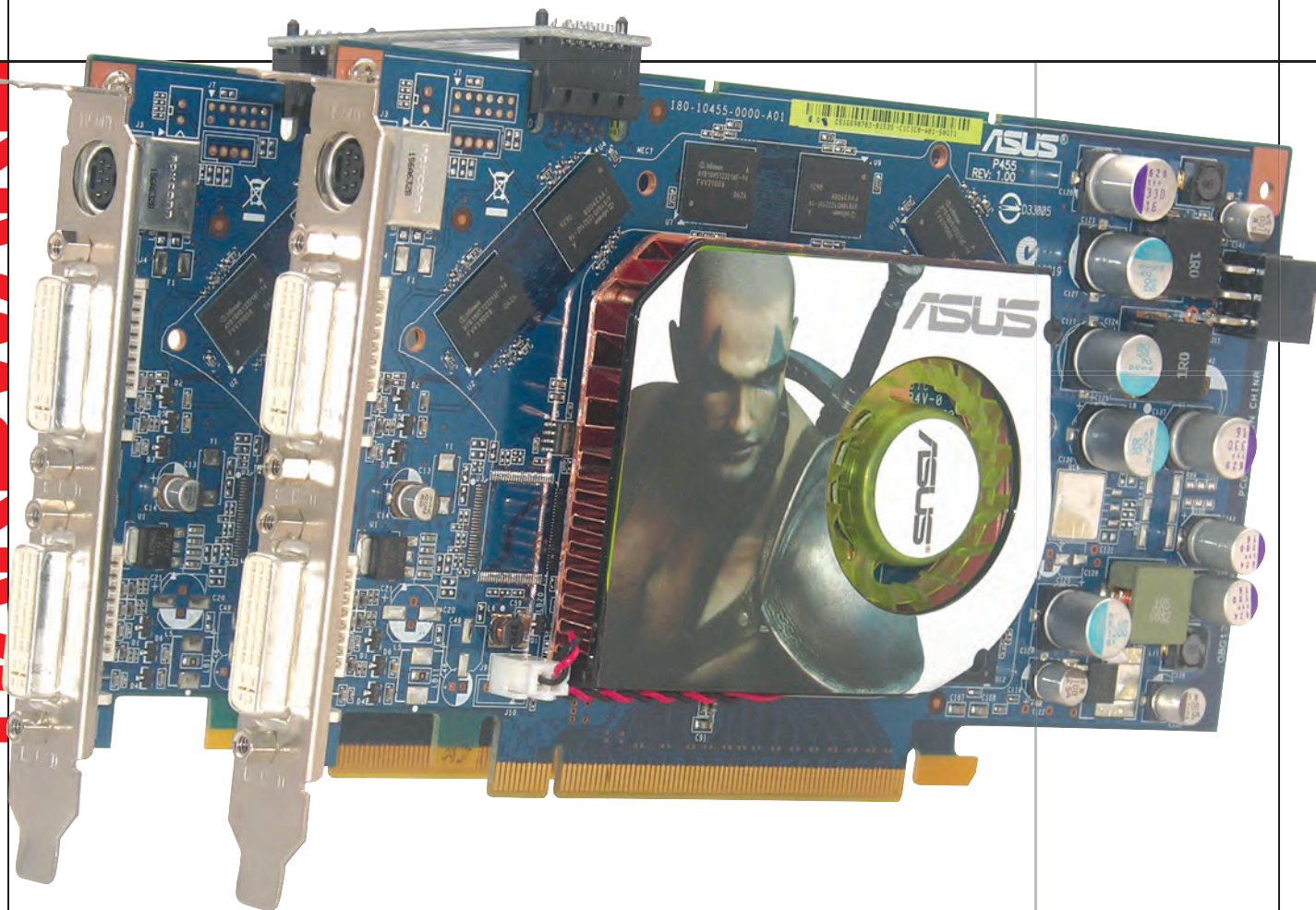
19. Dungeon Siege Legends of Aranna



20. Scrabble 2005 Edition

**R99 each**





# ASUS 7950GT SLI

**W**AIT, WHAT'S THIS? A GeForce 7 review in 2007? What's this about? Well, in our rush to get you the scoop on the GeForce 8 before the end of 2006, some things had to be shuffled around. ASUS dropped off a pair of 7950GTs around the time we got their 8800 samples. It shouldn't be hard to figure out which one we were more excited to test first (especially if you've read the last few issues), so the 7950s got lost in the shuffle. But we promised ASUS we would give them a proper review (and you're probably curious as well!).

The 7950GT is essentially a tweak of the 7900GT GPU. NVIDIA started getting better yields on their chips, and so the clockspeed was bumped up from a 450 core and 1,320 memory to a 550 core and 1,400 memory. There's also now a 512MB GDDR3 version of the card, which is the one we tested. Obviously, since the number of shader units and the memory bus width and type remain the same, it's unlikely we'll see any massive changes from its predecessor.

So, we set the cards up in our trusty AM2 4800+ and Biostar Tforce 590 SLI Deluxe with 1GB of Corsair XMS2-8000. While this platform is not bleeding edge anymore, it's still in the high-end category and probably most similar to those who are considering if they should grab a second 79xx series card now, wait for a cheaper 8 series, or break the bank on an 8800. In our opinion, waiting would probably be the best option.

We ran 3DMark06 with SLI both disabled and enabled. The score with one card was 5,234 overall, with a breakdown of 2,177 SM2.0, 2,133 SM3.0, and 1,803 CPU. Turning on SLI was a snap in NVIDIA's control panel, and didn't even require a reboot. With

two cards, our scores came to 8,131 overall, with 3,834 in SM2.0 and 3,746 in SM3.0 - CPU stayed at 1,803 naturally. While these scores are going to look quite good to anyone running a slower 7 series or 6 series card, they've got nothing on the 8800s. Even with SLI, the two 7950GTs will be hard pressed to beat a single 8800GTS, and the GTX is still easily going to top them.

Then there's the DX10 issue once again. With Vista finally available, the first crop of DX10 games is starting to trickle out. Some may argue there's no point in paying for a DX10-capable card without games to run on it, but our crystal ball here at NAG shows several games on the way, so unless you plan to upgrade again this year, it's probably best to plan for the future now. Even if you already have one card and are considering the second for SLI, it still may not be worth it. The average 7950GT 512MB is going for around R3,000-R4,000, which means the cheapest 8800GTS cards are only about R1,000 above that. If you're buying two, you may as well save some cash and get an 8800GTX instead - you'll come out ahead all around. While it may seem tempting to add the second card as a cheaper option than the 8 series right now, with the 320MB 8800GTS on the way and the 8600 Ultra not far behind, it's probably best to wait. Most games are still targeting 256MB cards, so even with two 512MB 7950GTs vs. a single 8800GTS with 'only' 320MB, the GTS will probably be in the same performance ballpark on DX9 games, and it offers DX10 support, which the 7950s don't. Considering that the 8600s are expected to have the same 256-bit bus width as the current 79xx parts and still come in at a lower price, they'll probably be a much more attractive SLI option shortly. **NAG**

## VITAL INFO

### ■ Pros

- Good performance
- Single-slot coolers
- 512MB

### ■ Cons

- No DX10 support
- Still not as fast as an 8800

### ■ Supplier

ASUSTek [011] 783-5450

### ■ Internet

<http://za.asus.com/>

### ■ RRP

TBA

### ■ Reviewer

Toby Hudson

## SPECS

### ■ GPU

G71

### ■ Core clock

550MHz

### ■ Shader version

DX9 3.0

### ■ Pipeline config

8 vertex/24 pixel/24 texture/16 output

### ■ Video memory

512MB GDDR3

### ■ Memory clock

1,400MHz

### ■ Memory interface

256-bit

### ■ Slot type

PCI Express 16x



# ASUS DRW-1612BL 16X LIGHTSCRIBE DVD WRITER

**F**OR THOSE WHO HAVE been out of the loop, LightScribe is a new feature popping up on DVD writers that allows you to burn an image onto the top side of the disc, providing you use LightScribe media. We recently got a hold of one of ASUS's new LightScribe writers, and put it to the test.

As far as regular DVD burning goes, the ASUS DRW-1612BL is a pretty decent writer. It boasts 16x write for both plus and minus media, 8x and 6x for minus and plus rewriteables respectively, 8x on dual-layer media, 12x for DVD-RAM if anyone uses it, and 48x for CD-R and 32x for RW. The read speed is likewise what one would expect: 16x for DVD and 48x for CD. It's a standard internal ATAPI burner, and ours unfortunately came in white, which now matches about zero of the cases in the office.

In testing, we found that a 2.5GB image took about 3:30 to read from a pressed DVD, and about 4:20 to burn to a 16x Verbatim LightScribe DVD+R. Then we flipped the disc over and loaded Nero's Cover Designer, which comes bundled with the drive. Despite a slightly confusing interface, we managed to get a reasonable looking design, and then set it to burn to LightScribe media. We set the contrast to 'best', and then waited, and waited - and waited some more. It took about 15 minutes to burn the cover art onto the disc, which is a bit disappointing. The only thing that was more disappointing was the result, which was blurry and faint. Having tested an HP LightScribe drive on the exact same media with far superior results, we concluded that the ASUS drive just doesn't burn LightScribe images very well. This, combined with a process that quadruples writing time and doubles media cost, makes it seem more like a gimmick than a usable feature. We think the stick-on printable label or even the trusty old sharpie is probably a better option for now. **NAG**

## VITAL INFO

### ■ Pros

- Supports all disc formats

### ■ Cons

- LightScribe comes out blurry and faint
- Long LightScribe label burn times

### ■ Supplier

Corex [011] 238-2315

### ■ Internet

www.corex.co.za

### ■ RRP

R450

### ■ Reviewer

Toby Hudon

## SPECS

### ■ Media types

DVD+/-R, RW, DVD-RAM, CD-R/RW

### ■ Read speeds

16x DVD, 48x CD

### ■ Write speeds

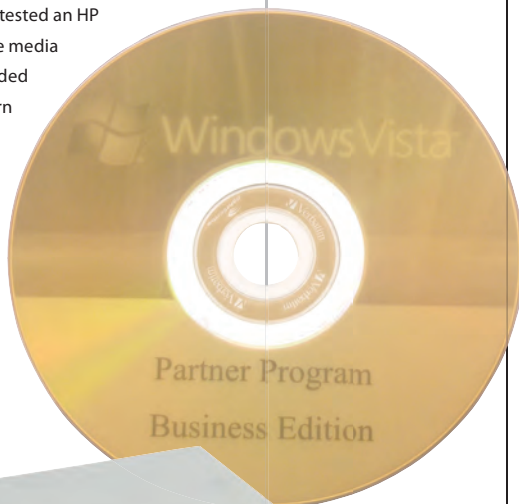
16x +/-R, 8x -RW/6x +RW, 48x DC-R/32x CD-RW, 12x DVD-RAM

### ■ Interface

ATAPI/IDE

### ■ Special features

LightScribe label burning support



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## THERMALTAKE LANBOX

**T**HERMALTAKE IS A BRAND most readers will recognise. Their cases are quite common and seen at many LANs around the country. So it's not unlikely that you may be seeing this particular case showing up soon at a LAN near you.

The Lanbox is about what you'd expect. It's a box, with a handle, designed to be taken to a LAN. This implies it's going to be small and lightweight. One of these is definitely true. Unfortunately it happens to be the former. The case is heavy. Deceptively heavy at that. We're not quite sure whether it's the gigantic metal handle on top, the thick plating on the front, or the fact that the rest of the case is SECC steel. But even empty it raised eyebrows when picked up.

The Lanbox is a microATX form factor, so one should be aware of this before planning to build a system into it. Fortunately microATX is no longer the joke it once was, and quite a few high-performance motherboards are available in this format. We doubt many users will be putting an SLI rig into this case though. It has space for three 3.5-inch drives, one of which is external and mounted sideways. There are also two very odd bays at the front. These are 7-inch with punch-outs for a 5.25-inch drive in each, though there's only a proper bracket for one. A quick flip through the manual shows that the 7-inch bay is designed to mount a standard 7-inch LCD screen designed for a car, and should take any that fit in a standard car radio bay. Alternatively, the bay can be converted to a second 5.25-inch bay, but the bracket for that didn't seem to be included. Both 5.25-inch bay fronts are hinged, so they're 'stealth' bays by default.

Cooling seems a bit lacklustre. There's a 92mm fan in the front

and twin 60mm fans in the rear. In the upper rear, next to the power supply, is a space that can be used to mount another fan, but it's only large enough for a 60mm. The cover there also has a tab that can be bent out to allow water-cooling hoses to enter and exit the case, but it seemed a bit small for any seriously high-performance water cooler we could think of. A Swiftech rig probably couldn't even get one tube through it let alone two. It's probably possible to improvise mounting for another couple of fans on the two side panels, which are clear and have vent slots in them, but there aren't any real proper mountings for fans there. This is a shame, as it seems like it would be a good place for a 120mm fan, which would be vastly superior to the rest of the cooling in the case.

All is not bad though. For a case this size it comes apart quite easily. The top comes off clean allowing ease of access into the case, and the rear panel slides out with the motherboard tray attached. This should make it pretty easy to get an actual system into it. It's also nice that you can get a proper full-sized ATX power supply installed instead of some proprietary solution with limited output. However, we found some of the internal metal edges to be a bit sharp, so unless you really want to give your arm a close shave, it would probably be better to fully disassemble the case rather than poke around in it when possible.

Overall, it's probably not a bad case. However, we'd recommend getting the aluminium version, which weighs just over half as much. Or even the aluminium version with no handle, which is less than half as much. **NAG**

### VITAL INFO

#### ■ Pros

- Fits standard microATX boards and ATX PSUs
- 7-inch bay for car LCD

#### ■ Cons

- Heavy
- Needs adapter for 2nd 5.25-inch bay

#### ■ Supplier

Corex [011] 238-2315

#### ■ Internet

[www.corex.co.za](http://www.corex.co.za)

#### ■ RRP

R2,200

#### ■ Reviewer

Toby Hudson

### SPECS

#### ■ 3.5-inch bays

2 internal, 1 external

#### ■ 5.25-inch bays

1 external + 1 more with adapter

#### ■ Fan mounts

3 x 60mm, 1 x 92mm

#### ■ Ports

2 USB, audio

#### ■ Motherboard dimensions

microATX

#### ■ Dimensions

300mm x 430mm x 280mm

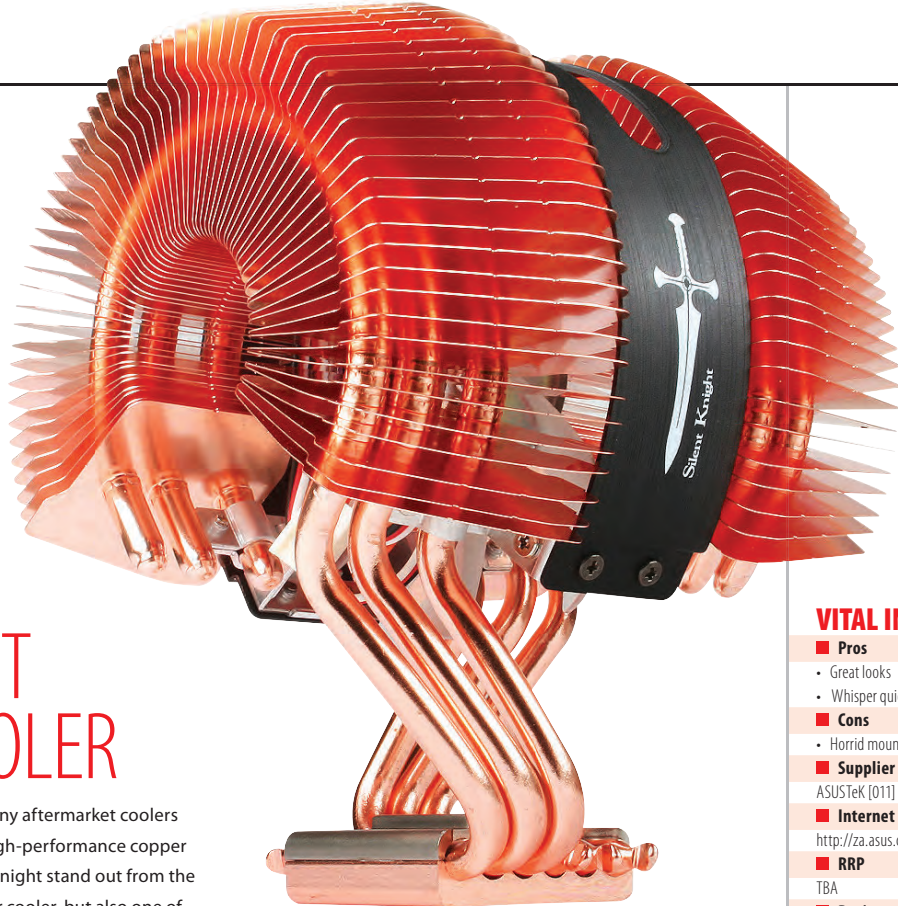
#### ■ Weight

7.5kg

#### ■ Special features

7-inch bays for car LCD





# ASUS SILENT KNIGHT COOLER

**T**HE ASUS SILENT KNIGHT is among the many aftermarket coolers that ASUS offers in its arsenal of high-performance copper coolers. What makes the ASUS Silent Knight stand out from the rest is that it is possibly the quietest air cooler, but also one of the better coolers in performance.

It is not of the calibre of the Zalman products, but does slightly better than many other aftermarket products that retail for similar prices. Where performance is concerned, the Silent Knight did well, managing to monitor the high temperatures of our Pentium 4 D 950 based machine. This feat, however, was only possible with some necessary modification of the cooler. This problem is not unique to the Silent Knight, but all other ASUS coolers that make use of a pressure mechanism to mount on the CPU bracket. The inefficient pressure that the clamping mechanism exerts on the cooler base is the source of this problem. This lack of pressure means that the base lifts ever so slightly of the CPU heatspreader, which results in a system idling at dangerously high temperatures or failing to boot altogether.

This problem is overcome by placing either double-sided tape between the clamp and the cooler base, or any other

material that will allow the clamp to apply the required pressure to ensure proper contact.

After the necessary modifications, the cooler performed well, managing to be much quieter than any reference fan, thanks to the heatpipe technology employed by the unit. The pure copper cooler handles loads very well as it keeps the idle and maximum temperatures close to each other, especially when compared to the reference cooler that ships with the CPU. This would be among the best coolers that ASUS has produced had it not suffered from the mounting problem, but sadly, it falls by the wayside like some of their other heatsinks. Where the unit excels is in its aesthetic properties. The blue fan light against the brushed copper looks very good and would look good in almost any case. With a little bit of improvement to the mechanism used in this cooler, ASUS can produce a unit that deserves a place among the best air coolers available on the market. **NAG**

## VITAL INFO

### ■ Pros

- Great looks
- Whisper quiet

### ■ Cons

- Horrid mounting mechanism

### ■ Supplier

ASUSTek [011] 783-5450

### ■ Internet

<http://za.asus.com/>

### ■ RRP

TBA

### ■ Reviewer

Neo Sibeko

## SPECS

### ■ CPU Support

LGA 775/ Socket 478/ Socket 939/940/AM2

### ■ Dimensions

115mm x 140mm x 110mm

### ■ Weight

610g

### ■ Connector

3-pin

### ■ Fan speed

2,200rpm

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**BOSE**







# D-LINK DI-724GU WIRELESS 108G QOS ROUTER

**W**HY ON EARTH IS NAG reviewing what claims quite clearly on its box to be an office-orientated router?

Well, you see, the DI-724GU includes one particularly important feature. It's called StreamEngine, and it's a Quality of Service (QoS) function that has been built into the firmware to lessen the lag experienced, even on our sluggish broadband lines, for applications that you prioritise. It's advertised in this form as being ideal for reliable VoIP communications by allowing the VoIP traffic to be prioritised over less time-sensitive connections like e-mail or HTTP.

Now we suppose that most office-orientated network managers would include gaming in the lower echelon of this bandwidth-priority scale, but we thought it would be interesting to do the exact opposite and find out how hardware-controlled QoS might actually help our online gaming experience.

Let's just have a quick look at the other features of the router though. It's a small unit, supporting up to four RJ-45 Ethernet jacks, an RJ-11 jack for the DSL line, and a single USB port. This port is for easy sharing of a USB printer: simply plug it in and share it on the router itself and every machine connected to the network will be able to use it. There are also two antennae for wireless duties of course.

Unfortunately but not unexpectedly, the 108G wireless connectivity is only available if you have a D-Link 108G Wi-Fi adapter in your system, so we weren't able to test this maximum claimed throughput, but transfers across the 10/100/1000 LAN interface are blazing. Unless you have a monstrous SCSI RAID setup, your hard drives will be unable to read or write data as quickly as the network can move it from one system to another.

We found the Web management interface to be an absolute

doddle to use, and what we particularly liked was that this console includes a variety of Wizards to assist the newbie without sacrificing the granular detail a hardened techie would look for. From this interface every function of the router can be tweaked, firewall rules added or modified, and the QoS profiles loaded up. There's even a very nice configuration saving utility, which will store your configuration in a file on the local hard drive from which it can easily be accessed at a future date.

We'd thought we might have had to include the games we'd be trying out into the QoS table individually, but lurking in one of the friendly-looking options menus is a simple button for 'Enabling Gaming mode'! Bonus! So we clicked it on and loaded *Eve Online*.

Now the funny thing is that in 'regular' operation, with only the game accessing the Net, the effects of the QoS prioritisation will be zero. It's when you open several background connections and a voice client that the settings come into play – and they work a treat. It isn't so much the outright throughput of the network that benefits, but more the consistency of communication between prioritised application and server – in this case ensuring that our connection to the server remained stable even when downloading on the same DSL link.

The difference is probably best demonstrated in a VoIP stream. Without prioritisation, these communications tools can become crackly and broken up, like a cellphone conversation in a low-signal area and just as frustrating to use. With the StreamEngine doing its thing, VoIP connections are rock-steady and crystal-clear. However, it does work for gaming as well, and if you plan to play a lot of online games with your new broadband link, this D-Link router would be an ideal choice. **NAG**

## VITAL INFO

### ■ Pros

- Good for games
- Manages bandwidth well

### ■ Cons

- None

### ■ Supplier

D-Link SA 08600 35465

### ■ Internet

www.d-link.co.za

### ■ RRP

R1,699

### ■ Reviewer

Russell Bennett

## SPECS

### ■ Standards Supported

IEEE 802.11g, IEEE 802.11b, IEEE 802.3, IEEE 802.3u

### ■ VPN Pass-through

PPTP, L2TP, IPSec

### ■ Device Management

Web-based – Internet Explorer v6 or later, Netscape Navigator v7 or later, or other Java-enabled browsers  
DHCP Server and Client

### ■ Security

64/128-bit WEP, WPA Wi-Fi Protected Access (TKIP, MIC), WPA-PSK (Pre-Shared Key), WPA2, WPA2-PSK

### ■ Media Access Control

CSMA/CA with ACK

### ■ Wireless Frequency Range

2.4GHz to 2.4835GHz

### ■ Modulation Technology

Orthogonal Frequency Division, Multiplexing (OFDM), Complementary Code Keying (CKK)

### ■ Wireless Transmit Power

18dBm

### ■ External Antenna Type

Single detachable reverse SMA

### ■ Network

WAN, WLAN (Wireless Connection), LAN (10/100)

### ■ Power Input

DC 5V, 2.5A

### ■ Dimensions

190.5mm (L) x 116.84mm (W) x 35mm (H)



# MICROSOFT HABU GAMING MOUSE

IT IS INTERESTING WHEN two leading brands collaborate on a product. Microsoft and Razer have teamed up to bring us a mouse specifically designed for gaming. This mouse features a broad design, which is generally better for gaming, because a narrow one tends to lead to cramping of the hand. The Habu's overall ergonomics are very sound – for a right-handed person. The upper surface is slanted slightly to the right, promoting more natural hand and wrist positioning. It also features a non-slip matte finish that feels very good. Furthermore, the forward and back thumb buttons on the left side can be customised – two sets are provided – to accommodate thumbs of different lengths.

Aesthetically, the Habu is also a hit. The finish is black with a translucent 'racing stripe' all the way around, which lights up in a striking electric blue when the mouse is powered.

The sensor is laser-based, of course, and doesn't power down. Poling frequency is 1,000Hz. The resolution can be changed on the fly by two small buttons located near the scroll wheel. These are subtle so that they are not pressed accidentally, which could be disastrous in the heat of a deathmatch, but easy and comfortable to access when necessary. Some may be put off by the fact that, as yet, no wireless model is available. The cable is unusually long, affording users flexibility in placement relative to the mouse surface. Naturally, the bundled software allows users to customise the buttons. **NAG**



## VITAL INFO

### ■ Pros

- Everything!

### ■ Cons

- Not for the left-handed

### ■ Supplier

Microsoft 0860 225 567

### ■ Internet

[www.microsoft.co.za](http://www.microsoft.co.za)

### ■ RRP

R599

### ■ Reviewer

Alex Jelagin

## SPECS

### ■ Poling rate

1,000Hz, 7,080fps

### ■ Connectivity ports

USB (gold plated)

### ■ Natural resolution (max)

2,000dpi

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## BENQ SV-371 HDTV

**S**O YOU HAVE A new console and you want high-res graphics. Or perhaps you're simply looking for a larger television. The ideal solution for gamers appears to be an HD projector, but these can set you back quite a bit of money, plus you need just the right wall, lest you want to have endless debates with friends on how you should change the texture and type of white you used. One step down, but still a significant step up, is to get an HDTV. Thanks to LCDs becoming more and more general in the technology market, large screen televisions of this variety have become a lot cheaper as well - though not by that much, as this model's price definitely shows. Twenty thousand rand for a TV? That's a lot of cash. It's one thing looking at a 7-10K entry-level model that only costs twice the amount of a next-gen console, but three times is a lot.

The reality is, though, that if you want both size and quality, an HDTV isn't going to be cheap. But why is the price of a BenQ product so high? The brand is definitely not unknown to gamers, having provided peripherals of all kinds to the lower-end of the market. But this TV is headed directly for the middle portion. Its size, resolution, features and price all indicate that it's competing against the likes of Samsung and any 37-inch

HDTV with HDMI support and a high resolution and contrast ratio.

Despite all of the models on the market, LCD manufacturers actually make up a very small group. Basically most LCDs you see on the market were made by someone's competitor. That's due to the technology being quite pricey, both in terms of research and manufacturing. An assembly line that churns out top-quality LCDs will end up making you a lot more money than just selling the final product. BenQ has the advantage here, because its LCDs are considered among the best on the market. Clearly it wants the rest of the product to reflect this, so the SV371 has a lot of features, a lot of inputs and a very nice look and feel. Annoyingly, there is only one VGA port and we couldn't find an Audio Out jack, which is a minor oversight.

It's not the best on the market and we think BenQ should have tried to get the price down by two or three grand, especially since the brand still has to prove itself in this market. But ignore any ideas you might have about low quality. The screen performs beautifully, and apart from a few menu problems and lacking features, all we really missed was an additional VGA port (one is never enough). **NAG**

### VITAL INFO

#### ■ Pros

- Lots of inputs
- Nice screen

#### ■ Cons

- Picture-in-Picture is limited
- Only one VGA input

#### ■ Supplier

Esquire 0861 70 0000

#### ■ Internet

[www.esquire.co.za](http://www.esquire.co.za)

#### ■ RRP

R19,999

#### ■ Reviewer

James Francis

### SPECS

#### ■ Screen Size

37"

#### ■ Screen Dimension

16:9

#### ■ Contrast Ratio

1,200:1

#### ■ Response Time

8ms

#### ■ Resolution

1,366x768

#### ■ Display Compatible

480i/ 480p/ 720p/ 1,080i



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# Intel Core 2 Motherboard Roundup

It's been a good seven months now since Intel introduced the Core 2 series of CPUs. As brilliant as these are, the supporting motherboards were not up to scratch. This was made worse by the fact that the previous champion Athlon 64 939 motherboards were the best the gaming and enthusiast communities had ever seen. This made the Core 2 boards look particularly bad. However, we are well into 2007 and it's the perfect time to see how far supporting motherboards and their chipsets have come. With AMD finally having a production board based on the RD600, all relevant chipset makers for the Core 2 platform have a board to represent them. Which ones are worthwhile successors to the many good 939 boards, and which ones fall by the wayside?



# THE CHIPSETS

## AMD RD600

The promised RD600 chipset took such a long time to show up that by the time it did there was only one motherboard based on the chipset, and chances are there will never be another one. It is one of those situations where the promise of performance was not worth the wait any longer and as such, it is unlikely that we will ever have a better implementation of the chipset than the one we have with us in the form of the DFI motherboard.

## NVIDIA NFORCE 680i SLI

NVIDIA's 680i chipset is what the 590 SLI chipset was supposed to be. The much-advertised overclocking ability of the 590 never materialised, but the 680i delivers in every way that the previous

chipset could not. It features EPP (Enhanced Performance Profiles) for RAM, GPU-EX, (PCI Express bus acceleration) 1,333MHz FSB support and the all-important ability to clock above the 400MHz mark. The ability to operate the RAM at any desired speed is one of the highlights of the chipset, making it the perfect vehicle for high-end 800MHz and faster RAM.

## INTEL I975

Intel's i975 is the oldest chipset here as it was ushered in when the Pentium 4 was still the most potent CPU Intel could muster. That also means it won't have some features that the other chipsets have, and also has some memory problems in the form of memory refusing to clock past a certain frequency depending on the selected FSB. The inability to run memory at an exact speed is one feature that is missed on the 975 chipset.

## INTEL I965

Although newer than the 975, the 965 is a lesser chipset in terms of features than the 975. It doesn't feature CrossFire capability, as the Northbridge doesn't have enough PCI-E lanes to satisfy the minimum 8+8 configuration of either CrossFire or SLI. It does, however, have better memory compatibility and does have the potential to clock far better than the 975 chipset.

## NVIDIA NFORCE 570/590 SLI

This is the chipset that was supposed to oust the 975 as the chosen chipset for high-end motherboards. Sadly, however, this chipset fell somewhat off the mark. While not completely useless, it failed to deliver anything that the nForce4 Intel Edition platform could not. As such, it remains one chipset that is best forgotten rather than owned. With the nForce6XX family available, there is no reason to look at this chipset other than for features that motherboards featuring these chipsets would have.

## DFI LANPARTY ICFX-3200 TR2/G

**Supplier:** Prophecy | **Website:** [www.prophecy.co.za](http://www.prophecy.co.za)  
**Phone:** (011) 888-5564 | **RRP:** R2,399

The only board to feature this chipset comes from arguably the best or rather the most enthusiast inclined manufacturer operating today. DFI has always had the most overclocking options of any board out there and this time they have once again taken it to the next level. The number of configurable settings in the BIOS is nothing short of spectacular. No matter how comfortable you believe you are in tweaking and tinkering the BIOS, the sheer number of settings on the DFI board is enough to scare you out of your comfort zone. Despite this abundance of options, the DFI has many other features that make it a worthwhile purchase. The DFI was able to clock right up to 470MHz and this made it an instant favourite. It was also the fastest CrossFire board available. It will not win any visual appeal awards, but it will deliver where it counts the most for enthusiasts, and that's in performance and stability. If the RD600 was only ever going to show itself once to the world, the DFI board is an excellent showing in all respects. With such attractive pricing, there's not much reason to consider any other CrossFire board, as they will undoubtedly not be a match for the ICFX3200.

### CHIPSET: AMD RD600

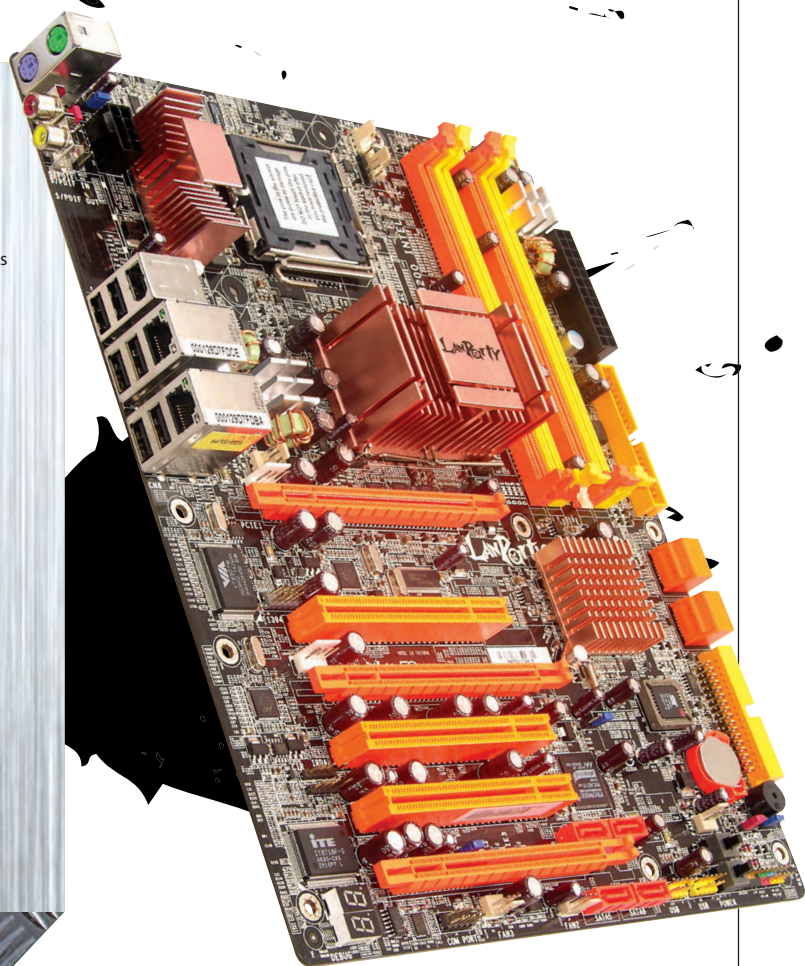
**CPU support:** Intel Pentium 4, Pentium 4 Dual Core, Core 2 Duo, Core 2 Extreme

**Memory support:** DDR2, 533/667/800MHz - 4 Slots

**External Ports:** 6 x USB 2.0, 6-Channel Audio, 2 x Gigabit Ethernet

**Internal Ports:** 6 x SATA 3.0Gb/s, 4 x USB, IDE

**Slots:** 3 x PCI Express 16x, 2 x PCI, 1 x PCI-E 1x





## INTEL BADAXE2 I975XBX2

**Supplier:** Rectron | **Website:** [www.rectron.co.za](http://www.rectron.co.za)

**Phone:** (011) 203-1000 **RRP:** TBA

Intel's embrace of the enthusiast market finally culminated in the introduction of the original BadAxe motherboard. This, however, is the second revision, which brings official support for the Quad Core 2 Extreme QX6700 CPU and better overclocking abilities. The BIOS that Intel makes use of is not under any circumstances the best there is. It's rather slow to navigate and unintuitive, but it does have all the relevant features that one may need. Since it's based on the 975 chipset, it inherits all the nuances that plague many 975-based boards that are not specifically designed with overclocking in mind. One such problem on this board is the inability to scale memory speeds effectively with the motherboard speed, which is concerning when taking into effect the difficulties associated with operating this motherboard at speeds above 370MHz. It is great to see Intel take an interest in the enthusiast community at motherboard level, but some things that other manufacturers include are lacking on the BadAxe2, such as a CMOS clear jumper or button and auto recovery of a failed overclock. One other issue with this board is that PSUs that make use of the common 4-pin 12V connector for the CPU are not going to work at all with this motherboard, irrespective of the rating of the PSU. It needs a 12V EPS 8-pin connector to function. The BaseAxe2 is far from being a poor board, but it isn't great either and finds itself with no real must-have feature.

**Chipset:** Intel i975

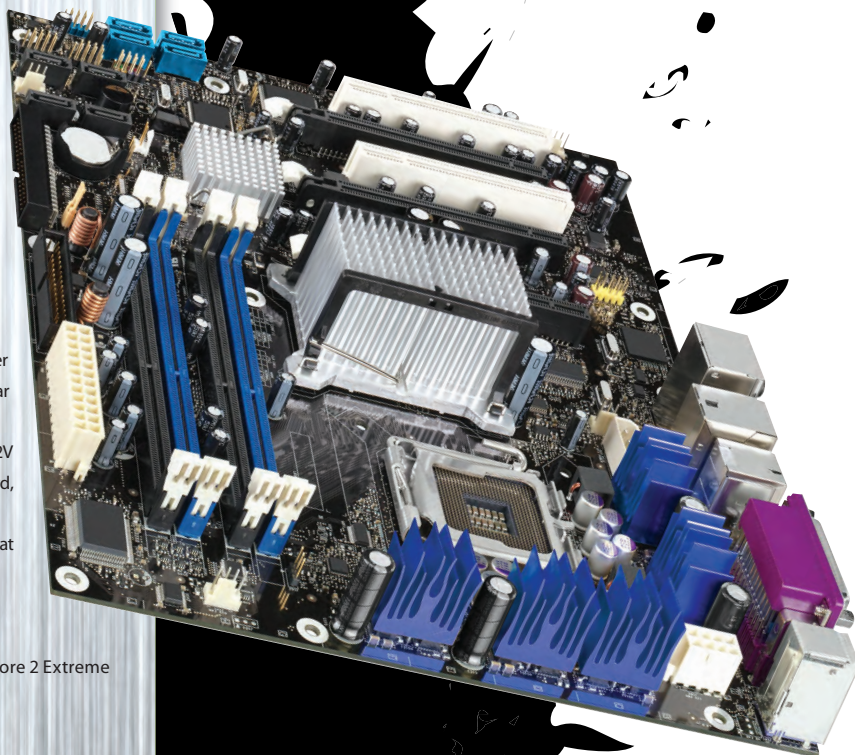
**CPU Support:** Intel Pentium 4, Pentium 4 Dual Core, Core 2 Duo, Core 2 Extreme

**Memory support:** DDR2, 533/667/800MHz - 4 Slots

**External Ports:** 4 x USB 2.0, 6-Channel Audio, Gigabit Ethernet

**Internal Ports:** 8 x SATA 3.0Gb/s, 4 x USB, IDE

**Slots:** 3 x PCI Express 16x, 2 x PCI



## ASUS P5N32-E SLI

**Supplier:** ASUSTeK | **Website:** <http://za.asus.com/>

**Phone:** (011) 783-5450 **RRP:** R2,650

This is a motherboard that is packed with features, but sadly suffers from the poor clocking headroom of the 590 chipsets. Having said that, it does manage a respectable 330MHz FSB out of the box, which can probably be further tweaked for an additional 10MHz or so. The motherboard features the usual premium utilities included in ASUS's premium packages, such as a wireless network adapter and a unidirectional microphone amongst other things. The motherboard supports NVIDIA's enhanced performance profiles for RAM and GPU-EX, and most importantly is SLI capable. All these features in some way negate the less than stellar overclocking headroom of this motherboard, making it a worthwhile consideration if overclocking is not exactly what interests you, but you want a feature rich motherboard that's SLI capable. This would have been among the better boards in the roundup had the DFI and the other 680i-based motherboards not been in the roundup. Sadly, however, the P5N32-Premium is relegated to mediocrity by the competition.

**Chipset:** NVIDIA nForce 680i SLI

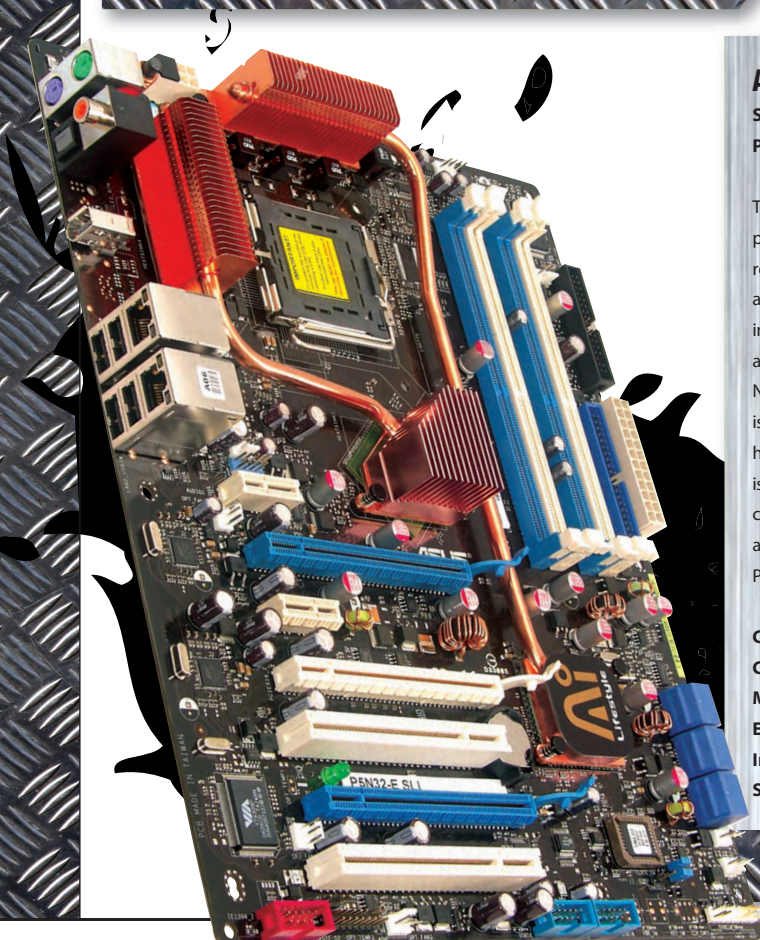
**CPU support:** Intel Pentium 4, Pentium 4 Dual Core, Core 2 Duo, Core 2 Extreme

**Memory support:** DDR2, 533/667/800MHz - 4 Slots

**External Ports:** 4 x USB 2.0, 2 x Gigabit Ethernet, IEEE 1394, Optical Out, S/PDIF

**Internal Ports:** 6 x SATA 3.0Gb/s, 4 x USB, IDE

**Slots:** 3 x PCI Express 16x, 2 x PCI, 1 x PCI-E 1x, Supreme-FX (Audio)





## ASUS P5N32-SLI PREMIUM

**Supplier:** Corex | **Website:** [www.corex.co.za](http://www.corex.co.za)

**Phone:** (011) 238-2315 **RRP:** R2,480

The P5N32-E SLI Premium is the gem of the 680i-based motherboards in this roundup. With all the features that the 680i chipset brings, this motherboard clocked the highest in the roundup and is the best showing that the 680i chipset has had yet bar the EVGA board. Much like the P5B-E Plus, this board doesn't pack the often-frivolous additions that come with many motherboards, but only gives enough to satisfy the price, leaving the magic to the actual performance, which is where it counts. Besides the high FSB this motherboard is capable of, it allowed the X6800 to clock better than on the other 680i motherboard in the test. All this was achieved at an even higher FSB and without an actively cooled Northbridge. While an updated version of this motherboard exists in the form of the P5B-E SLI Plus, this change is cosmetic as this motherboard supports the 1,333MHz FSB of the upcoming Core 2 CPUs. The only difference is that on the Plus this support is official while on this motherboard it's not natively supported, according to the manufacturer. For those looking to SLI configurations, there are very few motherboards that will be better than this one, and it is a favourite of ours.

**Chipset:** NVIDIA nForce 590 SLI

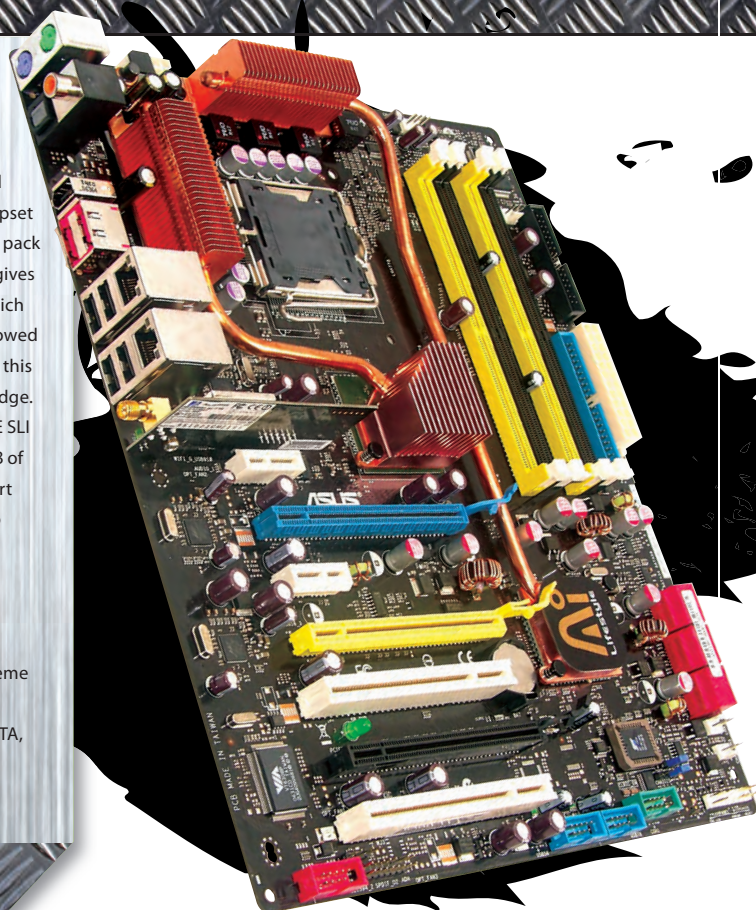
**CPU support:** Intel Pentium 4, Pentium 4 Dual Core, Core 2 Duo, Core 2 Extreme

**Memory support:** DDR2, 533/667/800MHz - 4 Slots

**External Ports:** 6 x USB 2.0, 2 x Gigabit Ethernet, Optical Out, S/PDIF, 2 x eSATA, Wi-Fi connector

**Internal Ports:** 6 x SATA 3.0Gb/s, 4 x USB, IDE

**Slots:** 3 x PCI Express 16x, 2 x PCI, 1 x PCI-E 1x, Supreme-FX (Audio)



## BIOSTAR TF680I SLI DELUXE

**Supplier:** Comstar | **Website:** [www.comstarsa.co.za](http://www.comstarsa.co.za)

**Phone:** (011) 314-5812 **RRP:** R3,699

The TF680i would have been among the top three motherboards in the roundup, but its high price and uninspiring reference design, paired with the marginally impressive (for the chipset) clocks, counted against it. While it inherits all of the 680i chipset features like all other 680i-based motherboards, it had several issues where clocking was concerned. One of which was the erratic stability of the motherboard at specific settings, where some speeds would refuse to POST, but others would POST just fine. This problem seemed to occur when the FSB was not set to a number divisible by five. For example, 410MHz would post, but 409MHz would fail. Obviously, this will be a problem if you are looking for the point where the CPU is stable for 24/7 operation while attaining the highest clock speeds. The package the Biostar offers is impressive in its presentation, but ultimately uninspiring as the motherboard itself is an NVIDIA reference design with no Biostar branding at all, yet the price would suggest something special, which is not the case. At a more reasonable price this would be a great product, but as it stands, it's merely average.

**Chipset:** NVIDIA nForce 680i SLI

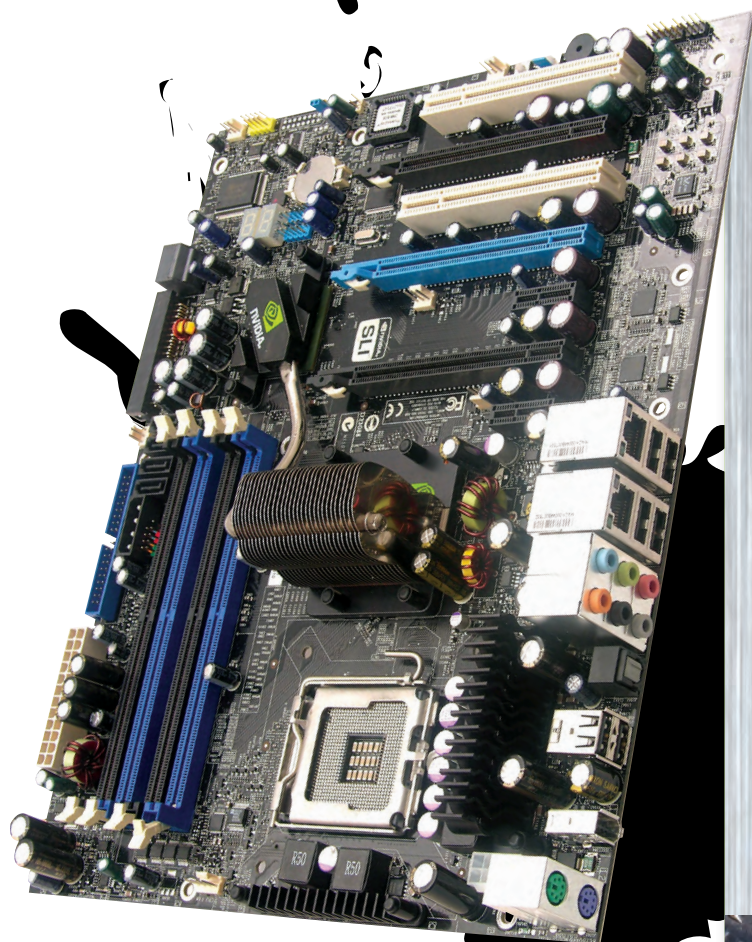
**CPU support:** Intel Pentium 4, Pentium 4 Dual Core, Core 2 Duo, Core 2 Extreme

**Memory support:** DDR2, 533/667/800MHz - 4 Slots

**External Ports:** 6 x USB 2.0, 6-Channel Audio, Optical Out, 2 x Gigabit Ethernet, IEEE 1394

**Internal Ports:** 6 x SATA 3.0Gb/s, 4 x USB, IDE

**Slots:** 3 x PCI Express 16x, 2 x PCI, 2 x PCI-E 1x





## ABIT AW9D-MAX

**Supplier:** Aleet Distribution | **Website:** [www.aleet.co.za](http://www.aleet.co.za)

**Phone:** (011) 888-8916 **RRP:** R2,495

The ABit AW9D-Max is, compared to the other motherboards here, passable in terms of overclocking, as it topped out at 400MHz at the most. However, the magic of this motherboard is in the aggressive yet stable setting that ABit has programmed into the BIOS itself. Clock for clock it can't be matched by anything else in the roundup. Maybe this is what prevents it from any worthwhile overclock, but it does in reality offer a measurable advantage over all other motherboards here in terms of speed. The ABit board isn't necessarily a cheap board, but does exactly what it promises on the package, and that is delivering unmatched performance. This advantage, however, can be easily overcome by other boards by merely setting higher clock speeds on the FSB. Speed is not everything as this board showed. This motherboard was the only Intel chipset-based motherboard that could run the high-speed PC8500 RAM at the rated speed. The other Intel chipset powered boards refused to run the RAM at anything over 940MHz, which would be a waste for the owner of such high-speed RAM. With such abilities, the AW9D-Max is proof that ABit is once again back after their long absence from worthwhile enthusiast-orientated motherboards.

**Chipset:** Intel i975

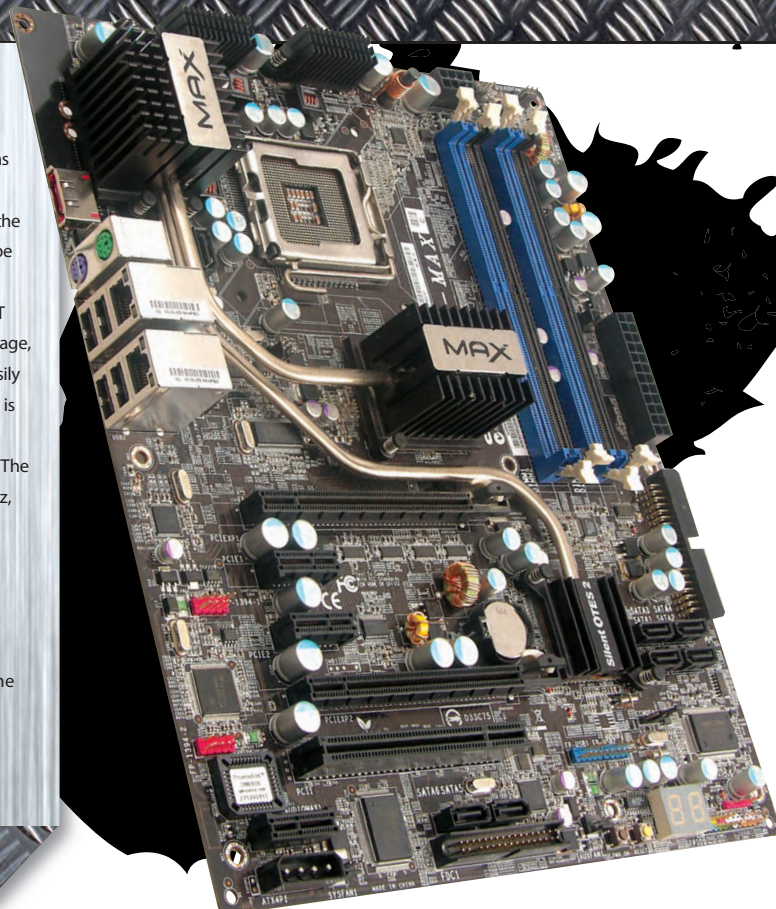
**CPU support:** Intel Pentium 4, Pentium 4 Dual Core, Core 2 Duo, Core 2 Extreme

**Memory support:** DDR2, 533/667/800MHz - 4 Slots

**External Ports:** 6 x USB 2.0, 2 x Gigabit Ethernet

**Internal Ports:** 7 x SATA 3.0Gb/s, 4 x USB, IDE

**Slots:** 2 x PCI Express 16x, 1 x PCI, 2 x PCI-E 1x, Audio-Max



## JETWAY LGA775 GT2-LOG NF570 SLI

**Supplier:** Esquire | **Website:** [www.esquire.co.za](http://www.esquire.co.za)

**Phone:** (012) 657-8500 **RRP:** R689

Besides the unnecessarily long name of this motherboard, it is one board that may be well worth the purchase if you are on a tight budget, but want to make use of your current SLI configuration on a Core 2 supporting platform. The motherboard is built around the NVIDIA 570 SLI chipset, identical to its older 590i stable mate, but only caters for SLI in an 8+8 configuration. Everything else, however, is the same. Jetway has put together a cost-effective package with this board in all respects and as such has managed to make its pricing very attractive. They may have, however, overdone it a little - for instance, in the positioning of the PCI Express 16x lane slots. They packed one after the other with no other expansion slots in between. The spacing is so bad that had one to operate two dual-slot graphics cards in SLI, there would be serious heat issues for the top card that would result in instability. This is a design flaw that was overlooked, but may end up swaying your purchasing decision one way or the other. For overclocking purposes, this board is average at best, but if you factor in the price, it's rather good as it allowed us to reach its maximum selectable 325MHz on the FSB. This brought it very close to the results obtained with the other nForce5-based motherboard. Had Jetway allowed a wider FSB selection range in the BIOS, maybe this motherboard would have matched the P5N32-SLI Premium, but this was not to be. This motherboard is a functional no-frills board that will neither excite nor disappoint you.

**Chipset:** NVIDIA nForce 570SLI

**CPU support:** Intel Pentium 4, Pentium 4 Dual Core, Core 2 Duo, Core 2 Extreme

**Memory support:** DDR2, 533/667/800MHz - 4 Slots

**External Ports:** 6 x USB 2.0, 6-Channel Audio, 2 x Gigabit Ethernet

**Internal Ports:** 6 x SATA 3.0Gb/s, 4 x USB, IDE

**Slots:** 3 x PCI Express 16x, 2 x PCI, 1 x PCI-E 1x



## ASUS P5B-E PLUS

**Supplier:** ASUSTeK | **Website:** <http://za.asus.com/>

**Phone:** (011) 783-5450 **RRP:** TBA

The ASUS P5B-E Plus is one of the easiest boards to work with. It has all the features you would expect from a motherboard based on the 965 chipset, but stands out from the rest in that it overlocks much better than the other motherboards based on the chipset. The motherboard was perfectly stable at a scorching 466MHz, which is a feat only two other motherboards achieved in the roundup, delivering better performance than the other boards costing as much as R1,000 more. While the motherboard is not CrossFire or SLI capable, it more than makes up for the absence of these features by having a very good layout, huge overclocking potential and a reasonable price tag. For those not interested in multi-GPU setups, there are very few motherboards that will provide better performance than the P5B-E Plus.

**Chipset:** Intel i965

**CPU support:** Intel Pentium 4, Pentium 4 Dual Core, Core 2 Duo, Core 2 Extreme

**Memory support:** DDR2, 533/667/800MHz - 4 Slots

**External Ports:** 4 x USB 2.0, 6-Channel Audio, IEEE 1394, S/PDIF, Optical Out, Gigabit Ethernet

**Internal Ports:** 7 x SATA 3.0Gb/s, 4 x USB, IDE

**Slots:** PCI Express 16x, 3 x PCI, 1 x PCI-E 4x, 1 x PCI-E 1x



## FOXCONN Q96575MC

**Distributor:** Sahara | **Website:** [www.sahara.co.za](http://www.sahara.co.za)

**Phone:** (011) 542-1000 **RRP:** TBA

In many ways, this isn't an enthusiast motherboard, but more suited to HTPCs and office environments where the latest feature sets and technologies are not essential. For one, it's the only microATX motherboard in the roundup; and secondly, it's the only one that features an integrated graphics processor in the form of the Intel X3000, which is fully Vista compliant (i.e., it features DirectX 9 hardware support for Aero effects and surprisingly is a unified graphics part with eight pixel shader units operating at 667MHz). This integrated video acceleration is paired with support for the Intel High Definition Audio standard, and that in some way allows the platform to be Vista Premium ready. Other than that, however, the motherboard is really not one for the gamers, let alone enthusiasts. It features no overclocking or RAM settings at all other than CPU multiplier settings. That means that specialised RAM that requires high voltages and the like are a no go despite the DDR800 support. The graphics performance is shoddy as expected and it is unlikely that you will be watching any high-definition content on the integrated graphics controller. For normal DVDs and the odd game of Quake III and other old titles, it will do just fine.

**Chipset:** Intel G965

**CPU support:** Intel Pentium 4, Pentium 4 Dual Core, Core 2 Duo, Core 2 Extreme

**Memory support:** DDR2, 533/667/800, 4 Slots

**External Ports:** 4 x USB 2.0, 1 x Gigabit Ethernet, 1 x VGA, 1 x Serial Port, 1 x Parallel Port

**Internal Ports:** 6 x SATA 3.0Gb/s, 4 x USB

**Slots:** 1 x PCI-Express 16x, 2 x PCI, 2 x PCI-E 1x



## CONCLUSION

The three best motherboards in this roundup are the ASUS P5N32-E SLI, ASUS P5B-E Plus and the DFI ICFX-3200 TR2/G. That's one SLI motherboard, one CrossFire motherboard and one single GPU solution board, all three managing to clock above the 460MHz FSB mark with ease. There are other boards, such as the ABIT AW9D-Max, worth a look if you are in the market for a Core 2 Duo board, but for sheer performance and value, the three motherboards cannot be beaten by anything else in this roundup or anything else available locally.



# US BROADCASTER ANNOUNCES TELEVISED GAMING LEAGUE

**D**IRECTV, THE USA'S LARGEST provider of satellite television, has caught onto competitive gaming as a spectator sport. After running two trial events last year, testing different games, rules, and ways of capturing the action, the ambitious broadcaster unveiled its Championship Gaming Series at the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas in January. Touted as the mainstream breakthrough e-sports has been waiting for, CGS will be broadcast to over 100 million homes across the United States, and around the world through partnerships with British Sky Broadcasting and STAR Television Asia.

"We couldn't help but notice that gaming had actually become a sport," said DirecTV's president, David Hill, "not only in the way the gamers created teams to compete, but also in their conditioning and mindset and dedication while playing. The reaction to our first production, the Championship Gaming Invitational, was little short of phenomenal, so it was a no-brainer to take this next logical step to create the series." And with backing from sponsors such as Mountain Dew, Microsoft and Best Buy, DirecTV has the financial resources to succeed.

While it can be tricky to sort through the media hype

surrounding any major event, CGS does seem to have a solid foundation in place. Ratings from the trial events confirmed the viability of a televised gaming league, and a number of recognised e-sports industry leaders have been brought onboard to assist in production. Among them is professional gaming's poster-boy, Johnathan "Fatal1ty" Wendel, who signed on both as an advisor and as the league's exclusive commentator.

The Championship Gaming Series will begin with a national American circuit, later branching off into a number of leagues around the world – regions identified at this time are North America, the UK, Europe, Asia/Australia and South America. Each separate league will produce a winner and runner-up in each of the three games, and these players will move on to compete in the global finals. All competitors and managers will be paid monthly salaries, with the added bonuses of instant prize payouts.

The selection of game titles has spurred some controversy among the established e-sports world, with *Counter-Strike: Source* being chosen over the more popular *Counter-Strike 1.6*. The selection was based primarily on the game's suitability for television



broadcasting, especially since CGS will be filmed in high definition. The other two games are both Xbox 360 titles: *Dead or Alive 4* and *Project Gotham Racing 3*. While neither of these have significant traditional online communities, they were selected due to their popularity on Xbox Live. More games have been hinted at for future iterations of the series, and due to Fatal1ty's influence we can probably expect one of them to be a one-versus-one first-person shooter.

According to the official Website, [www.championshipgamingseries.com](http://www.championshipgamingseries.com), filming and broadcasting both begin later this month. **NAG**

## FOUR KINGS RECLAIM WC3L TITLE

**T**HE ELECTRONIC SPORTS *WARCRAFT III* League (WC3L) has for many years been the premier battleground for team-based strategy gaming. Virtually every professional *WarCraft III* player in the world takes part, and major gaming teams put their squads together almost exclusively with this league in mind. Simply put, the WC3L offers the highest prize payouts, and the stiffest competition. Tens of thousands of replays are downloaded by fans each match day, making it one of the most-followed leagues in all of e-sports.

Season ten of the WC3L came to a close this January in Cologne, Germany, with the seemingly-indomitable Four Kings (4K) crowned champions yet again. The team, home of famous international stars such as Manuel "Grubby" Schenkhuizen (Netherlands) and Yoan "Tod" Merlo (France), had previously won the league four times, but this, their most recent performance, would turn out to be their best yet. After a disappointing run in season nine, where they lost to the Meet Your Makers (MYM) of South Korea in the playoff final, 4K came out all guns blazing for the regular season of season ten, racking up an unprecedented 44-point record. They won all eleven matches with an average score of 4-1 (the highest possible being 5-0), and entered the playoffs as the highest seed.

However, a serious setback occurred just before the finals, as 4K's veteran Undead player, Dae Hee "Fov" Cho, left to join the upstart Chinese team Wisdom

Nerve Victory (WNV). Fov explained the change of team and relocation to China as the only way he could avoid compulsory South Korean military service, which would have cut short his gaming career. Several other top South Korean players have moved to China for the same reason.

4K's situation now seemed reminiscent of season eight, where they were forced to attend the playoffs with only three players (a WC3L team consists of at least four) and still managed to win. However, the addition of Norwegian rookie Olav "Creolophus" Undheim ensured that they would be able to present a complete line-up, though still a much-weakened one. As most observers agreed, their success would depend on the flagship duo of Grubby and Tod, both in their solo matches, and as one of the world's top two-versus-two partnerships.

Due to a lacklustre regular season from 4K's strongest opponent, MYM, the two favourites were scheduled to meet in the first round of the playoffs. With MYM at full strength, and their leading player Jae Ho "Moon" Jang (South Korea) once more in top form, it looked as though 4K would struggle. Brilliant map selection by MYM's manager, Jesper "Nordahl" Henriksen, saw the odds stacked further against the Kings. But Grubby and Tod turned the match around strikingly, decimating their solo opponents (including a win for Grubby over his nemesis, Moon) and taking the 2v2 without dropping a map. With

three points already secured, 4K had won the match – and with surprising ease too.

In the upper bracket final, the Kings faced another strong Asian opponent, World Elite (WE). Unfortunately for WE, their Chinese players were refused entry into Germany, and without two-time World Cyber Games winner Xiaofeng "Sky" Li, they were unable to slow 4K's momentum. 4K won 4-1, earning them a place in the grand final match.

Predictably, the grand final would turn out to be a repeat of the game against MYM, the South Koreans eager for revenge after their earlier loss. But yet again Grubby and Tod proved unstoppable, with Tod removing Jae Woong "Storm" Kim and Grubby thrashing last year's Electronic Sports World Cup winner, Jae Wook "Lucifer" Noh. In the end, the 2v2 match wasn't even needed, as rookie Creolophus defeated Jung Ki "Susiria" Oh in a thrilling best of three, giving 4K a 3-1 overall victory.

With the qualifiers for season eleven already completed and matches beginning this month, visit [www.wc3l.com](http://www.wc3l.com) to see if the Kings can continue their remarkable run. **NAG**

### RESULTS:

1. Four Kings – €10,000
2. Meet Your Makers – €6,000
3. World Elite – €3,000
4. Mousesports – €1,000



# LOCAL LIVE TOURNAMENTS FAR FROM PERFECT

**O**NLINE GAMING IN SOUTH Africa has seen a dramatic increase in activity following recent increases in the availability of local bandwidth and the increase in the number of online-only games. Currently, the local community even manages to sustain a large enough Xbox Live community to warrant buying a Gold account. Throughout the week, players gather for evenings of *Gears of War*, *Rainbow Six: Vegas*, *Chromehounds* and *Call of Duty 3*.

If you look hard enough at most functional online communities, you tend to find sponsored and organised teams and matches, and the local Xbox Live community is no exception. koldFusion, Webmaster of [www.txl.co.za](http://www.txl.co.za) and organiser of these matches, even sponsors simple awards and prizes for competitors. Unfortunately, once in actual practice, these matches tend to be plagued by poor planning and incoherence. Competitors are often left to formulate their own matches and often they can spend hours playing on private deathmatch servers while waiting to be told who they're playing against and how. Server hosting is a lost idea, and full tiers of players are left to decide between themselves who the duty of hosting falls to.

The rules of the matches also tend to be poorly considered and contrived. One example would be that teams are shuffled during the *Gears of War* preliminary matches. Anybody who has played *Gears of War*'s multiplayer knows that it's an incredibly team-orientated game, and so one of the base fundamentals of the online mode is lost entirely. Similarly, the *Rainbow Six: Vegas* tournament was conducted by piling everyone onto a deathmatch server, and awarding prizes to the top three players.

Although the regulations are ludicrous and the organisation leaves much to be desired, the competitive scene is still an easy way to get into a server full of people. However, due to the fact that it's competitive, more casual players might find themselves being a bit short-changed. In general, it's a better idea for casual players to get a band of friends; for professional gamers to play at events that have official recognition and sponsoring; and for purists to avoid the tournaments entirely. Anyone looking for an evening of fun will be blindsided by the rigid score-based mentality, as every rule governing the tournament is there to reinforce individual ability and remove team play and cooperation, which often vivisection the game being played of the core of its design. **NAG**







## RYZOM

[www.ryzom.com](http://www.ryzom.com)

ON THIS MONTH'S COVER DVD you can find *Ryzom*, a very underrated and often overlooked MMORPG. *Ryzom* has a free, unlimited trial that lets you play for as long as you like, but with provisos. Trial players are limited to the Refugee Island (think Pre-Seering Ascalon from *Guild Wars*) and can only leave for the Mainland if they subscribe, and they cannot level skills beyond 21.

*Ryzom* was released in 2003 and has managed to sustain itself in a variety of ways, mainly through a dedicated subscriber base as well as funding from various Arts and Sciences groups, who appear to appreciate what *Ryzom* is doing.

The game combines many elements from various other MMORPGs and has a few unique facets. Biggest of these is the ability to create your own missions, for you and your friends to experience. The Ryzom Ring, as it's called, is a built-in editor that lets players design missions, place creatures and set up objectives. Player-created missions are the only instanced zones in *Ryzom*.

*Ryzom* doesn't let you cut any corners, skill progression takes time and effort, reaching the

maximum level in any of the four main tiers (255) will take you much longer than most other MMOs. The four skills, Magic, Melee, Harvesting and Crafting let you level them independently when used. Craft a lot, creating armour and weapons, and you gain experience in crafting. Hit a certain level in Crafting, and it subdivides into more specific categories such as Armour crafting or Jewellery crafting. Focus on crafting Armour and you gain experience in crafting Armour, eventually that will subdivide into types of armour, or specific armour for specific races. This lets you really focus on exactly the skills you want to progress in, although you'll never lose the ability to work on your other skills. It is actually possible to reach level 255 in all four skills.

Another unique feature to *Ryzom* is how the skill actions are constructed. Assembling a series of 'stanza', you literally build up your own customised skills. You'll have to balance the cost of the effects by adding in stanza that use up stamina, 'focus' or make the spell take longer to cast. This lets you edit and change your existing skills, rebuilding them to suit your play style or rewriting them from scratch to be more economical.

Traditional MMOs usually have very sparse landscapes in terms of monsters and creatures, a few dotted here and there for players to attack. *Ryzom* has a much more numerically impressive approach: huge herds of creatures wandering the landscape or innumerable monsters attacking outposts or cities. When over a thousand creatures attack, it really is a remarkable sight. Guilds can purchase/build their own outposts, which may come under attack from creatures or other guilds. Massive outpost vs. outpost wars are not uncommon, because outposts provide extra functionality for Guilds, thus they are much coveted.

There are many generations in the MMO genre. *Ryzom* in its design harkens back more to the *Ultima Online* or *Everquest* generation, where players wanted more freedom. *Ryzom* lets players support the more adventurous killers, by letting them craft weapons or armour, while players who harvest the materials for crafting quickly receive major monetary compensation for their efforts - harvesting and crafting are much more lucrative than just heading out and killing creatures. **NAG**





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## PROCEDURAL GENERATION

THERE'S A NEW BUZZWORD DOING THE ROUNDS IN GAME DEVELOPMENT PRESS RELEASES AND DEVELOPER FORUMS ALIKE: PROCEDURAL GENERATION. WE TAKE A LOOK AT THIS ANCIENT TECHNIQUE THAT'S FINDING NEW PROMISE IN OUR CURRENT GENERATION OF GAMES.

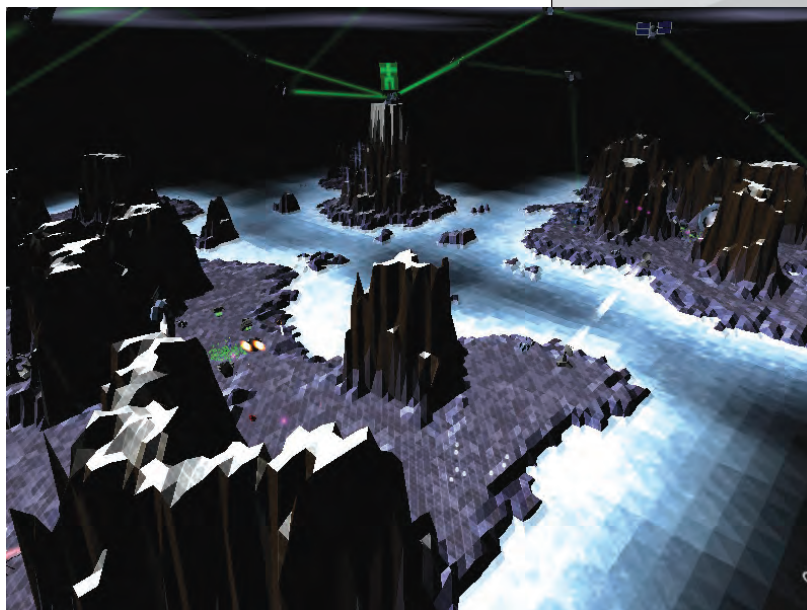
### WHAT IS IT?

**P**ROCEDURAL GENERATION IS A technique to build resources (the actual resource format depends on what the specific game requires; everything from textures, to maps, to AI routines can be generated instead of pre-built) from scratch within the program itself instead of having an artist, level designer or scripter build each individual item by hand.

With the demands of next-generation games really pushing graphical fidelity and large environments, it's not surprising that studios are starting to look for ways to create more replayability by generating new levels on the fly, or cutting down on budgets by using a few clever programming tricks to generate textures and animations instead of having to pay legions of artists to produce them.

It's ironic then that procedural generation of content was first used when game developers were facing an entirely different set of limitations: storage space. Back in the days of the Spectrum and the BBC Micro (don't panic if you have no idea what those were; they're just really old first-generation home computers that plugged into TVs), developers needed ways to provide players with truly large playing areas. However, there was no way they'd be able to store all that data on the audiotapes that games came on. It proved a lot simpler to build a few rules that could be used to generate those areas from a few simple building blocks. After all, you could use the rules as many times as the player wanted - just throw in some random factors and they'd be playing through a slightly different experience every time.

Space-trader classic *Elite* was one of the first games to use procedural generation extensively. The game would take a random string of letters and build entire solar systems for the player to explore. In fact, the game's publisher recommended against letting players have access to all the possibilities provided by the generation system. They didn't want players to be completely swamped. *Elite* shipped with the ability to generate eight galaxies consisting of 256 distinct stars each. This was only



due to the publisher deciding that two hundred and eighty-two million million galaxies to explore might be a bit daunting for the casual player...

Therefore, procedural generation takes content generation away from being a labour-heavy job and turns it into an opportunity for unforeseen situations and combinations. Everyone likes a bit of newness in their games, after all.

### WHO USES IT?

Developing a game is an expensive endeavour. Any way that developers can lower the bottom-line a little without sacrificing gameplay is worth it... In fact, in many cases randomly generated content is seen as gameplay enhancing, which makes us wonder why it fell out of favour in the first place. Perhaps it was the complexity of using it well, or the issues inherent in trying to generate high-quality content out of random chance...

Because procedural resources can be produced in the hundreds of thousands, some game companies are using them to inspire artists' creativity: *Oblivion* used a tree-generation system to give their terrain designers more models to choose from. It's important to note that *Oblivion* itself didn't generate trees; it just had three models that were generated beforehand when the game was developed and then selected as looking like "good trees." Other games such as Introversion's *Darwinia* used randomly generated maps as the basis for their story missions... This is actually a popular trick in puzzle titles: build a random puzzle generator, get your designers to play tons of levels and





pick up as many tricks as possible, then have them arrange those tricks and puzzle elements artfully in patterns that players will find enjoyable.

The Diablo series used map-segments randomly glued together to give us different maps every time we played the game. They were different enough to provide novelty, but followed enough of a pattern to still be familiar: The first map of Act 1 always contains the Den of Evil location, but in different locations every time the map is generated. The progression of areas is always the same, but the exact way you explore keeps changing. The upcoming Hellgate: London promises to generate random 3D landscapes to battle through, also using a segment system, almost like a less complex Lego set where certain edges of pieces can fit together while others can't.

From the indie perspective, Strange Adventures in Infinite Space and its sequel populate randomly generated star maps with random aliens, random items and random hazards. German-produced .kkrieger, however, goes a different route and procedurally generates all its textures and meshes when the game loads. Instead of leaving the looks of the game up to random chance, the designers at theprodukt used specific steps and 'recipes' to go from seeded Perlin noise to an embossed brick texture. Cleverly, they ensured that their six to 12 instructions produced the same texture or mesh every time, meaning that .kkrieger gives you an entire first episode of a 3D FPS in just 96KB.

## HOW DO WE USE IT IN OUR OWN GAMES?

The possible applications of procedural generation of content are practically limitless and bounded only by your own imagination. However, there is a general set of principles that can help you start using either dynamic, pre-constructed content or pre-specified random content in your games. It all comes down to building the generation system. For this, you need to keep three things in mind:

1. Identify your boundaries. You need to specify exactly what it is that you're generating and what you expect the generation system to spit out. Notice patterns in the 'real' content and put those down on paper. Find out what people find natural and what they consider strange or glaring. If you're generating textures, then you're going to want textures of certain sizes and colours, possibly with edge-continuity, etc. If you're generating trees, you're going to have size constraints, types of tree, etc.

Part of this is knowing your game well and understanding what it is you're going to need in terms of novelty and variation. Plan for a gradual increase in novelty as the game progresses. Make sure you're not always going to be generating the exact same type of thing with slight differences.

2. Decide on your building blocks. Are you going to generate a texture pixel by pixel? That'd be slow and laborious. Functions to manipulate the entire thing would be much better. You can simply apply those functions in random orders. What about a series of 'brushes' that can be splattered onto the texture randomly?

An important part of building something procedurally is storage. You need to store your building blocks in smart ways that let you get to all of them and run whatever checks/balances/algorithms you're going to need. Designing a good generation algorithm is going to take a lot of thought and a



good deal of foresight into how everything is organised. Data structures are your friends!

3. Decide on a method to use said building blocks to create your content. What operations are you going to be performing on the building blocks? Turn those operations into functions and come up with ways to parameterise them so that you can add in some random somewhere along the line.

You're also going to need to set up metrics that you can use to judge the 'readiness' and acceptability of anything generated so far. Those are up to you, the effect you want to achieve and how you're storing your data. After all, how are you going to know when your content is done? It's only a very limited set of problems that can be guaranteed to have produced something acceptable after a set number of iterations of generation... You need to be able to weed out the ones that don't fit with your constraints, preferably as early in the process as possible.

Procedurally generated content can free you from huge art requirements or having to design thousands of levels for your games, but be careful how you implement it. Because you're letting random chance dictate how your game plays, you have to be extra careful that players will always be able to win the game and not get stuck somewhere because your algorithm wasn't 100% foolproof.

In the end, creative uses of procedural content are going to drive future generations of games. Imagine a game that finally has a stable story, generated on the fly according to your character's actions... And that's just the tip of the iceberg. **NAG**

## QUESTION BOX:

Our dear editor suggested a new feature. Each month we take a question from the Game.Dev forums (<http://forums.tidemedial.co.za>) and put the answer in print. The first question is Game Maker related and is generally asked at least once every two months...

**Q:** "How do you make it so that the camera is locked onto the main char, like in Mario?"

**A:** Go into the Room Properties for whichever room you want the 'camera' to follow your main character in. Click on the views tab, enable views and set the Object following to your character object. Tada! The HBox and VBox values are how close the object being followed can get to the side of the screen before the view scrolls... Play around with them and see what works best for you. If you want your object to always be in the centre of the screen, set these to half your view width and half the view height respectively.



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# WARCRAFT: THE BOARD GAME

**Supplier:** Boardgames.co.za | **Tel:** 082 880 2707

**Players:** 4

**RRP:** R770

**W**ITH THE POPULARITY OF *World of Warcraft*, it is not surprising that a board game has been published as well. Fantasy Flight Games has produced one of its largest games yet – *World of Warcraft: The Board Game* is a massive, weighty box filled with bags of miniatures (heroes and monsters), cards, dice, player aids, a rulebook and a gigantic mapboard. The mapboard itself represents the northern part of the Eastern Kingdoms, from the plaguelands down to SouthShore. All the races and classes – along with innovative levelling and character specialisation trees – are represented, as well as normal, elite and wandering monsters. Spells,

enchantments, and rare and epic weaponry, armour, trinkets and wands are in the game as well.

How does the online game translate into a board game? Quite well actually. Whilst it doesn't emulate the long grind to high levels (thank goodness), it plays fast and is easy to follow and understand. The online game mechanics translate well through the use of different coloured dice, with blue representing ranged combat and abilities, and green dice and red dice defensive and offensive capabilities. As in the online game, the different classes complement each other well. Non-PVP

combat tends to flow fast as the players try to complete quests and face wandering monsters. However, PVP combat is where the game stumbles, as it can turn into a long, drawn-out affair (unless one uses the 'deadly' alternative PVP combat rules).

*WoW: BG* is in essence a race game between two groups (Alliance and Horde), with both groups trying to build up their characters to face one of three end bosses, with the atmosphere of the online game added to it. Avid players of *World of Warcraft* will enjoy playing the game and seeing how the online concepts were translated to the game itself. **NAG**



# MONTY PYTHON AND THE HOLY GRAIL: ULTIMATE EDITION

**Cast:** Monty Python

**Directors:** Terry Gilliam and Terry Jones

**Genre:** Comedy

**Rating:** 13V

**RRP:** R149.99

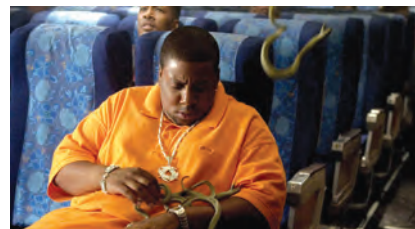
**K**ING ARTHUR GOES AROUND England, rounding up knights for his cause. Along the way, God commands him to find the Holy Grail. This leads him and his knights down a road filled with shrubberies, three-headed giants, castles full of women, quizzes about swallows, a killer rabbit and the French.

**The Movie:** Okay, let's get this straight. You're not reading this part because you don't know what *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* is. Everyone has heard of this movie. There's even a very good chance you've seen it, even if you don't know about it. However, in case you still wonder, it's one of the funniest movies made by some of the funniest people who have ever existed. Soon you'll know the words for Knights of the Round



Table and use lines from the Black Knight. But let's be realistic here: you've probably seen it. However, do you own it? You should.

**The DVD:** This is another bit of cashing in on the Python name – and nothing wrong with that, except if you bought the Holy Grail edition released a few years ago. This one comes on three discs. Commentary, documentaries, foolishness, the soundtrack, other Python stuff and a bit come on the two DVDs and one music CD. It's a steal, but nothing new, really.



## SNAKES ON A PLANE

**Genre:** Thriller | **Rating:** 13LNSV | **RRP:** R149.99

You know, *Snakes on a Plane* just isn't as good as you initially think it is. If it were a bit more like, say, *Eight Legged Freaks*, it would have been very entertaining. It's not bad, but you'll only watch it once. In fact, remove Samuel L. Jackson, who plays an FBI agent, and the movie would just fall flat. His job is to keep a witness alive who saw a gangster murder someone, but said gangster gets the idea to unleash pheromone-mad snakes on the plane, hopefully crashing it. Lots of screaming and biting ensue, with more swelling and some nail-biting moments. But there are no surprises beyond the first screening. Maybe the Internet hype was just a bit too much for it.

**The DVD:** Commentary, deleted scenes, a few dummies and a not so good music video made for the movie.

## SUSPIRIA

**Cast:** Jessica Harper, Stefania Casini

**Director:** Dario Argento

**Genre:** Horror

**Rating:** 18

**RRP:** R199.99

**A**GIRL JOINS AN ELITE dance school to further her career, but soon things don't seem to be as they appear. A series of horrific deaths cause her to look deeper into the real activities at the school. But why was she brought there in the first place?

**The Movie:** *Susperia* is pretty old and can be a strain to watch. On top of that, it is Italian horror, which can be quite confusing or just very cheesy. Nevertheless, it's a classic by Dario Argento, especially renowned for his special effects work. The soundtrack is also well known and intense, but the whole package dates from 1971, pre-dating many of the horrors that influenced today's films. The lighting is also quite interesting, and the gore was definitely innovative for its day. Because it is dubbed and so old, the characters often appear to be completely stupid – more than today's horror



fan might expect from damsels in distress. It's also not terrifically graphic and gives you a bit of appreciation for how much more liberal today's gore movies are. Still, horror fans will be the only ones interested in this.

**The DVD:** A fair amount of features, including the movie being reformatted for 16:9 televisions. No commentary, though.



## THE FAST AND THE FURIOUS: TOKYO DRIFT

**Genre:** Racing | **Rating:** 13LV | **RRP:** R149.99

Two words: car porn. That's what this series has always been about. Everything else, though, is dumb. A high school senior (who looks 25) is sent to live with his dad in Japan after he gets into trouble street racing. However, the school day passes in a flash and he's soon hooked up with Japan's own street racers. This is obviously a big deal, since Japan is renowned for its street-racing scene. Before long, we have a bad guy, a nice guy helping him, an attractive girl and plenty of cars. The acting is terrible and the dialogue even worse, but the racing scenes are really impressive, especially since it involves a lot of that Japanese specialty: drifting. Apparently, they wrote off many cars doing this movie – and it shows. If *Need for Speed* just isn't enough flash for you, *Tokyo Drift* has more.

**The DVD:** Lots and lots of material, including commentary, making-ofs and a look at the Japanese racing scene.



## Dark Tower: The Gunslinger Born #1

**Format:** Comic – Series

**Publisher:** Marvel

**Writer:** David / Furth

**Artist:** Lee / Isanove

**Price:** \$3.99

**T**HIS NEW SERIES REVEALS the origins of Stephen King's *Gunslinger*, covering some of the adventures that were only hinted at in King's *Dark Tower* books, and presenting its world of ancient technology and potent magic with the intense art of Jae Lee and Richard Isanove. The comic will stay true to its source, written by two acclaimed authors and overseen by Stephen King himself. This is a must read for all the *Dark Tower* fans out there!

## Pieces for Mom - A Tale of the Undead

**Format:** Comic – 1-shot | **Publisher:** Image | **Writer:** Steve Niles

**Artist:** Andrew Ritchie | **Retail Price:** R33.95

**T**HIS ONCE-OFF COMIC TELLS the tale of two young boys trying to survive in a zombie-infested world, but the story has a twist. Not only must they struggle to elude the human scavengers and hordes of rabid zombies, but they must also constantly search for food for both themselves and their newly turned zombie mother who retained her ability to talk and recognise them when she changed. That kind of strain must take its toll.

## Iron Man: Extremis

**Format:** Graphic Novel | **Publisher:** Marvel | **Writer:** Warren Ellis

**Artist:** Adi Granov | **Retail Price:** R129.95

**T**HIS IS A SUPERBLY written and illustrated story in which Iron Man faces off against a genetically altered terrorist who has taken a new and biologically improved version of a super soldier serum. Now Tony Stark must figure out a way to take this new enemy down in time to save the US government, and get to the bottom of the puzzle surrounding Extremis.

## Walk In #1

**Format:** Comic Series | **Publisher:** Virgin | **Writer:** Jeff Parker | **Artist:** Ashish Padlekar

**Retail Price:** R29.95

**D**AVE STEWART'S *WALK IN* tells the story of a guy named Ian, who suffers from mysterious blackouts, which last for days, sometimes even weeks, and which force him to travel the world endlessly, leaving bitter people behind him. He also has a strange mental ability, which he mixes into an act in an attempt to find a new home in Russia. However, can he keep things under control and survive all the oddities in his mind?





# IDENTITY CRISIS

**S**O, WE ARE NOW truly into the Planar Chaos season of *Magic: The Gathering*, and we can take a proper look at what's been happening in the Standard scene. As mentioned in last month's article, this set is all about mixing it up: chaos has overtaken Dominaria, and it's affecting everything, including spells themselves. The changes wrought by Wizards of the Coast in this expansion are truly...

...some might say "too radical", even. In Time Spiral, a new gimmick was introduced, 'timeshifted' cards, which were reprints of old cards, even some that are now considered to not conform properly to the modern 'colour pie'. In Planar Chaos, Wizards have opted to follow this theme, but with a slightly different slant. Given that the premise behind the set is 'alternate reality', some old cards have been reprinted with new names – and in different colours! Thus, for example, Wrath of God now makes an appearance in black as Damnation. This is quite understandable, and makes much sense. However, some of the other 'timeshifts' seem a little more random. For example, black now has a counter spell, white has a couple, and red got trample and swapped it off to green for haste. Flying has been taken from blue and white and spread around; green getting some of it. Soul Warden has been reprinted as Essence Warden – in green. And green has also been given the bulk of card drawing!

I am going to take a moment to gripe here. (February, which is when I am writing this, seems like a good time for gripes. After all, if January is the Monday of the year,

February is Tuesday, which is merely Monday Part III) Let us take a look at the green card Harmonize.

**"MOVING COLOUR-DEFINING ABILITIES AROUND THE COLOUR PIE, IN MY OPINION, WATERS DOWN THE COLOURS' IDENTITIES"**



Some of you will recognise this as a direct colour-shift of blue's Concentrate. Blue is traditionally the

colour of card drawing (along with black, though the latter usually does so at the expense of something, most often life), which is why Concentrate is placed in blue. However, the blue player who runs concentrates encounters an interesting conflict in this card: blue wants to keep mana open in order to respond to an opponent's plays, either with counter magic or other instants, so playing this sorcery-speed card drawer can usually only take place from around turn six or thereabouts onwards. Furthermore, blue's creatures, with a very few notable exceptions, are generally notoriously weak, so this card drawing, powerful as it is, is moderated and mitigated in these ways. Now, let's take a look at what happens when mono-green gets this card. Green: the colour of big 'stompy' creatures, and man acceleration, traditionally. So, on turn one a mana elf, perhaps, or something similar on turn two, then on to turn three, not needing to marshal out-of-turn mana, green can go ahead and draw three cards! This makes this card much more powerful in this colour – perhaps even disproportionately so. Time will tell. And time will also tell whether other such swaps have far-reaching and even negative affects on the game.

I will sum up my gripe with the following: moving colour-defining abilities around the colour pie, in my opinion, waters down the colours' identities. Let me know whether you agree or disagree with me – I'm most curious to poll the public's opinion on this topic! E-mail to alex.jelagin@tidemedia.co.za.

## SCRYING THE SYNERGIES

**I**T'S MADNESS, I TELL you! Yes, the last set returned the 'madness' mechanic to the game, albeit only in black (though some red madness has been introduced in Planar Chaos – such as the new version of the Arrogant Wurm). Blue, on the other hand, is renowned for its 'looting' abilities – "draw a card, discard a card" and variants thereof. This means that black and blue are natural allies (in this way among many others!). Current madness cards include Psychotic Episode, Nightshade Assassin and Dark Withering. Effective enablers for their madness abilities are Looter il-Kor, Thought Courier, Careful Consideration and Compulsive Research, among others. These cards allow you to dig deeply into your deck and, instead of having to sacrifice a card out of your hand, you get something in return! There are other enablers other than the abovementioned blue cards: artifacts include the Skullmead Cauldron and the Mindless Automaton, as well as some black cards such as Smallpox and Nihilistic Glee. The madness mechanic in general, if harnessed well, can be exceptionally strong, so if black and blue are your colours of choice, go wild!





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